

# Techniques of Teaching English



M. M. O. Sarala  
D. Bhaskara Rao

**L**iterary anthologies give first place to poetry through the nineteenth century. Those of the twentieth century give more and more space relatively to prose.

The present book has eloquently dealt with varied aspects of teaching of English and is cynosure.

### **CONTENTS**

1. English Teaching
2. Teaching of Poetry
3. Science and Poetry
4. Future of English with Linguistics
5. Speech: Its Origin and Nature
6. English Teaching and Remedial Work
7. Basic English—What is it?
8. English Words and Achieving Success
9. Relation of Vocabulary with Intelligence
10. Style and Correctness and Use of Grammar
11. Coloured Folk Designation
12. Another Word from One Word
13. Reading and General Semantics
14. High School Graduates and their Library
15. Treatment of Disorders of Personality

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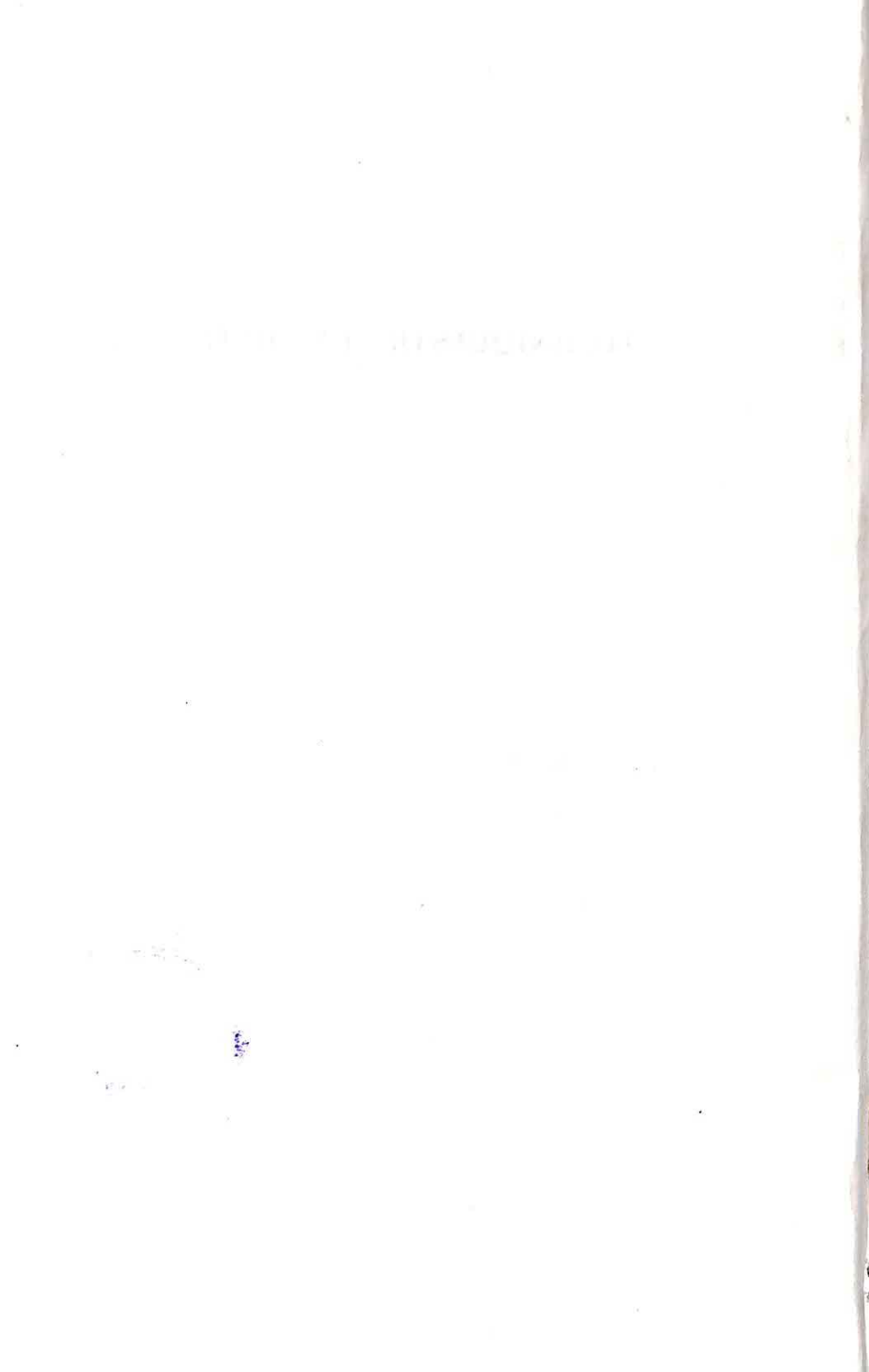






TECHNIQUES OF TEACHING  
ENGLISH





# TECHNIQUES OF TEACHING ENGLISH

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## Preface

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Literary anthologies give first place to poetry through the nineteenth century. Those of the twentieth century give more and more space relatively to prose. The impetus of centuries carried verse fairly well through the Victorian period; but by that time its dominance was clearly waning. It was losing to the multifarious prose that had developed so slowly as a competitor. It has lost ground to the novel, the essay, to histories like those of Carlyle and Macaulay, written under the influence of Soctt. Serious stage plays were composed in prose. And now we must take into view, too, the sketches and biographies and autobiographies and travel-book and the miscellaneous political and sociological matter that our presses pour forth in floods. The Victorian poets were the last to have great place, and even their poetry, in the context of the present, seems to shrink somewhat in depth and significance when placed beside the creations of the trail-blazing minds that composed *Oliver Twist*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *The Egoist*, *The Return of the Native*, in England, and, on the Continent, *Ghosts*, *The Doll's House*, *Le Débâcle*, *Die Waber*, *Resurrection*.

The profounder and truer vein in the last half of the century ran, not through its poetry as in the earlier half, but through its prose.

Thanks.

—Author



# Contents

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1. English Teaching	1
2. Teaching of Poetry	16
3. Science and Poetry	29
4. Future of English with Linguistics	43
5. Speech : Its Origin and Nature	53
6. English Teaching and Remedial Work	65
7. Basic English—What is It?	69
8. English Words and Achieving Success	76
9. Relation of Vocabulary with Intelligence	89
10. Style and Correctness and Use of Grammar	97
11. Coloured Folk Designation	104
12. Another Word From One Word	123
13. Reading and General Semantics	131
14. High-School Graduates and their Library	146
15. Treatment of Disorders of Personality	155





## English Teaching

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It if find that the whole business of education has become a frightening chain of buck-passing. The college blames the secondary school for sending on insufficiently prepared students, the secondary school blames the elementary school and the kindergarten, the kindergarten blames the home; and the home, looking pathetically for some one to blame, turns to chromosomes and prenatal influences. The other day a class of sixteen-year-old boys discussing English literature came across one of the intensely devout poets of the seventeenth century, a poet who spoke with tenderness and humility of The Cross. Then came to light the incredible fact that three-quarters of that class of twenty young Americans from civilized and privileged homes had no idea of the importance of The Cross.

No idea of the meaning of the symbol of Christianity, a symbol of agony and sacrifice which has influenced literature and painting and sculpture and philosophy for two thousand years.

Don't misunderstand: this article is not dealing with religious training; it is dealing with background. You do not require to be a Mohammedan to know that such a book as the Koran exists. This article is dealing with background, the kind to background which is essential for the intelligent understanding of most of the world's thought and art and history; everything, in other words, that falls outside the circle

of petty gossip. Now what is the reason for this ignorance, this fact that fifteen out of twenty normal people had no idea of the meaning of The Cross? And they would have been equally baffled by a mention of Sir Isaac Newton, of Euclid, of Aunt March, of Uriah Heep.

The reason is that the generation which is growing up today doesn't read. It doesn't know how to read. Some one explain the fiery furnace to you, and you know at once what is meant, since you have read about it; and if you were fortunate, you had one of those illustrated Biblestory books with hair-raising drawings of Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego.

The present generation knows those three names, but not for the reasons you think: it is because one of the popular swing bands has made a record with that title. Probably you know what is meant by a mention of Mr. Micawber and something about to turn up; of the Pool of Tears: of the Owl and the Pussy Cat; of Dr. Watson; of Jos Sedley; of Dr. Foster who went to Gloucester; but your children don't. Because they don't read. The reasons that they don't read are obvious. Stand outside a movie theater some beautiful Saturday afternoon. Watch the children come out, rubbing their eyes (they've sat through two full-length films), pale, yawning to get clean air; and remember what happened on your Saturday afternoons. Remember how you played bandit or robin Hood, drawing on our reading for inspiration. Sit near a radio in those precious dark hours before dinner on a winter evening, the time when you used to be able to come in from a snowball fight and join a ride down the Paris road with d'Artagnan. Listen for a some evenings to the brave little girl who ultimately gets through her algebra test at Southwest High or the virtuous and goggled jung men fighting eternally against the monsters of the twenty-first century, and see if it's a better



race that we're breeding. Of course the movies are fun: the radio can be fun when it isn't scaring the next generation to death or filling it with all kinds of queer ideas of success; but there was a day when the movies and the radio didn't absorb all the time that ordinarily can be provided to reading. There is just as much time in a day as there was, and today's children are just as bright and have just as much information as you had. The only difference lies in the kind of information. They can tell you every move that the characters in the funny paper have made for the last years. They know an amazing number of batting averages. They are astonishingly glib about the personnel of the various jazz orchestras. Well, we all used to know our batting averages too. But today's children know nothing about books. And isn't that their parents' fault? What are the books and stories you remember best? Aren't they the books you read in the fourth or fifth year of your reading proficiency? Can't you quote endlessly the names of characters from the reading you did in those early years? The depressing fact remains that the reading done before twenty is the reading that sticks. What is the name of the heroine of the novel you liked so much last year? For that matter, what is the name of the novel? Who was the principal male character in *Dusty Answer*, in *The Matriarch*, in *It Can't Happen Here*? You'd know if you'd read them at fourteen. You wasted your time on a lot of junk: so did we all. And we all enjoyed it. Remember that a child's reading is the reading of a completely free spirit. "I like it", the child can say and he will have no fears of being wrong. He doesn't have to agree with the best-seller lists just because he thinks he should, and he doesn't have to disagree just to be contrary. There is his mind, wanting to be filled, ready to take whatever comes to it; and see what it is getting.

You know what the ordinary grade-B movie of today is like: you've sat through hundreds of them in order to see

what they call the main feature. It doesn't need much arguing to convince you that they aren't worth any one's Saturday afternoon. But do you know what the late afternoon radio programmes are like? Those programmes that take up most of the air between four-thirty and six, practising the neat little box-top racket: "Mother buy us some Barley-Goo so that we can get an F-man badge". Have you ever listened to them?

*Station a. Announcer:* What does Woody intend to do with Valerie's check for one thousand dollars, made out to cash?

### **Station b. (Apparently a play within a play)**

*Annoncer :* Tonight we present Miss Wilbur in a one-act play, SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE.

*Mexican Voice :* Your most gracious pardon, Senorita. Allow me to return the ring.

*Ingenue :* Then you are just a common bandit.

*Ingenue:* My father is an entomologist.

*Mexican:* That means?

*Ingenue:* Oh, just bugs.

*Mexican:* Greengo ees funny people. Out in world there is lovely music and dancing, and they go after bugs.

*Mexican:* You take me seriously?

*Ingenue:* I can't take you at all. You have taken me.

(Then the play ends after a good deal more of this talk)

*Woody:* Gee, Dad.

*Dad:* Judy was swell. I think we're going to have her tied up with Marshall Films. Judy will be in the spotlight.

*Woody:* Dad, I believe in Judy Wilbur like I believed in . . . ; in Mother, Dad.

*Station c. Scence:* Damascus.

*Pete:* Hi, Jack, Come here. See if you can make this

puddin'-head talk.

Deep Voice: Ha, ha, ha.

Pete: Are you laffin?

Deep Voice: I am laughing at me. I amuse me.

Jack: Pete, we've got orders. We've got to find Uncle Jim.

### Station d.

Voice: It's the reaction to this let-down. There's no chance for their to escape.

Another Voice: I don't blame ya for feeling' low about this, Skipper. You deserve a rest, Skipper.

Skipper: The Scorpion isn't going to take this lying down.

### Station e.

Man's Voice: Those three guards . . .

Child's Voice: We don't have to worry, Daddy.

Daddy (clearly speaking to prisoners) : How do you three like being prisoners?

Daddy: We sure do need that plane. It's going' to help us locate the secret radium field.

There it is, fragmentary, to be sure, but you can fill it in any afternoon at your own radio.

Of course, no one ever believes that a quotation from a book taken at random is really at random, but these are the first paragraphs we open to in a few books:

Long John's eyes burned in his head as he took the chart; but by the fresh look of the paper, I knew appeared to disappointment. This was not the map we found in Billy Bones's chest, but an accurate copy, complete in all things — names and heights and soundings — with the single exception of the red crosses and the written notes. Sharp as

must have been this annoyance, Silver had the strength of mind to hid it.

"Yes, sir", said he, "this is the spot, to be sure; and very beantifnly drawed out. Who might have done that, I wonder? The pirates were too ignorant, I reckon. Ay, here it is: 'Capt. Kidd's Anchorage' — just the name my shipmate called it."

... the old queen packed up quantities of clothes and jewels gold and silver, cups and ornaments, and, in fact, everything suitable to a royal outfit, for she loved her daughter very dearly.

She also sent a waiting-woman to travel with her, and to put her hand into that of the bride-groom. They each had a horse. The princess's horse was called Falada, and it could speak.

It is said that the effect of eating too much lettuce is "spoorific".

I have never felt sleepy after eating lettuces; but then I am not a rabbit.

They definitely had a very soporific effect upon the Flopsy Bunnies!

When Benjamin Bunny grew up, he married his Cousin Flopsy. They had a large family, and they were very improvident and cheerful.

This is the tower of Babel. The people are all at work building it. They want to build it up as high as the sky. They say, Come, let us build a tower that shall reach up to Heaven! But god sees the tower, and he is not pleased with them for building it. And now he will do a very wonderful thing to stop them. He will make them, all at once, speak in a separate way from what they spoke before. Then they cannot go on building the tower because they do not understand one another.

There was, as I had noticed on my first visit long ago, an iron safe in the room. The key was in it. A hasty suspicion

seemed to strike Uriah; and, with a glance at Mr. Micawber, he went to it, and threw the doors clanking open. So I just took a look, and shoved along, straight for town. Well, the very first man I see when I got there was the duke. He was sticking up a bill for the "Royal Nonesuch" — three-night performance — like that other time. *They* had cheek, them frauds! I was right on him before I could shirk. He looked astonished and says:

"Hel-lo! Where'd you come from?" Then he says, sort of glad and eager, "Where's the raft? —

Find us magic like to this coming through the ether on an ordinary afternoon, and we'll take it all back, a thousand times. No one would advocate a ban on radio listening for the young. There is a great amount of highly useful and entertaining broadcasting going on today, broadcasting which a child should definitely be allowed to hear. But books deserve an even break. It is not essential to say that the motion pictures are fun. None of us would be without the memory of *Robin Hood* or *Snow White* or the first *Beau Geste* and many others, but no one would deny that the excitement of those films taken from books is half the result of known the books ahead of time. Would you rather look at snapshots of people you know, or of the acquaintances your friends made on last summer's boat trip?

## II

The cause for the title to this article is that so many parents leave to the school all the exposure to this background we have been talking about. It is the school's business too, of course, but there are several things to cover in school, matters which need the background the home can give; and the school hasn't time for all of it. More than that, even though you make school as attractive as you like

and give children the choice of different-coloured seats every morning, you still leave them with the idea that reading is school work to be left behind with the arithmetic examples and the yellow paper daffodils they have been pasting in a springtime window.

What they are going to remember in the greatest detail when they have grown up is the life they know at home. Is it to be largely a memory of twirling dials and a rush to make the early show?

### III

It is all very well to deplore the lack of background in the ordinary American youth, but it is not all very well to make no constructive suggestions about it. How can you go about interesting a child in reading?

In the first place, a couple of *dont's*. Don't pay a child to read. By reducing reading to the level of cutting the lawn, you make it something to be finished as efficiently and as absent mindedly as possible. There was a little girl who was paid when she was nine years old to read a life of Martin Luther. Any excitement she could have found in a tale of perseverance and heroism was lost in a constant calculation that when ten more pages were finished, she would have another ten cents in the bank. Another little girl was sent off by herself when she needed punishment and made to read the family genealogy. Today when she visits the cemetery where he forebears lie, the elms echo with her glee as she walks between the tombstones, a "serves-you-right" expression on her face.

The best way to interest children in reading is to read aloud to them. But don't force it. Don't make any one stay to listen. You have every right not to be interrupted; but any child who does not want to listen should be at complete

liberty to go away and play by himself. A third little girl had all her potential affection for Dickens killed, because her father in a burst of Bracebridge Hall enthusiasm insisted—before any one had been allowed to open a single present—on reading the *Christmas Carol* aloud every twenty-fifth of December for fifteen years. It's a tough literature that can stand abuse like that.

The best time to read to children is at bedtime. Any child loves the feeling that he is being permitted to stay up a little late, even if it be for fifteen or twenty minutes—notice all the common ruses about drinks of water—and if he feels that he is getting a little respite on the regulations about the bed hour, a child will gladly listen to anything. Read aloud yourself: you will find a great satisfaction in having them tell you just what was happening when you left off last night. If you are going out for the evening, appoint a deputy reader, or explain long enough ahead of time so that the disappointment will not be sudden.

Don't pick books which are too young for your audience. Better let the youngest listener strain upward than stultify the older ones. The age gauges for children's books are about as reliable as the size gauges for their clothes. Dig back and remember when you were able to take *Treasure Island* and *Huck Finn* well in stride. A child will find out that there are times when it is inconvenient for old people to read to him: and he will begin to read for himself. A pleasant end of the day has led painlessly into a permanent and joyful habit.

Twenty minutes a day with your children at bedtime. When no one is whining, and when every one is clean and wide-eyed, and you are the means of carrying them to Camelot or Rome or the banks of the Mississippi. Is twenty minutes a day too much for that?



The high-priests of education are spending these days a great deal of their time and energy on reading. Not only with the appalling lack of background, which is our principal concern here; but with the difficulty, amounting to inability, in the simple mechanical process. Children read too slowly; they read inaccurately; they can't remember what they read. We don't need to go into the ramifications of this inability, the serious effect it has on all school work. There is a great deal of talk carried on in the professional jargon about strephosymbolia (mirror vision) and what seems to have become the *craft* of reading. Now, no one would pretend that there is not such a condition as strephosymbolia, or that there is not cause for honest alarm in the reading inaptitude of many school children. The technicians, with their tests and their special classes, have done untold good and removed many a child from that miserable state of thinking himself a hopeless dunce. But a disproportionate amount of this technical difficulty is the direct result of failure to practise. How can any one expect a child to read well in school when he never reads at all anywhere else? When reading is limited to the "Bhop's" and "Zowie's" of the funny paper, what hope is there for easy reading? There is yet to appear any method of increasing speed and comprehension which is better than the regular practice and fun of reading for what the book says, the fun of being hardly able to wait to find out what the Black Prince will discover behind the wall. Faced with the enormous amount of juvenile literature that the world contains, a modern parent will rather understandably reel. Books about aeroplanes, books about oil wells, books about locomotives. Books about everything, and the book salesman can make them all sound good. There is more good juvenile literature being written today than ever before, but you as a parent need have little worry about it. The people who give



presents to your children will take care of the new books. What are the old-timers that they need? Well, in the first place, you own books. Don't be afraid of them because they are not modern. Don't listen to the people who say that modern children want to read about the twentieth century.

Of course they do, but they love to read about the past too. Just as you did. You didn't think that stories were hopelessly out of date because people went everywhere on horseback. Or that a duel on the castle ramparts was silly since the duelers didn't use pistols. The stories of ancient Rome that used to mean a lot to you are no farther away from your children than they were from you. So banish the cry for modernity. The twentieth century will take care of itself. But the past often requires a little caring for. It is too much to expect any child to be able to read the ordinary edition of the King James Bible. It is hard enough for a theologian to follow the intricacies of the numbered verses, the copious cross references. Even such a beautiful book as Ernest Sutherland Bates's *Bible Designed to be Read as Living Literature* is too much for a child. Partly since as Alice said, there are no pictures or conversations. The conversations are so hidden that they might just as well not be there. No, find one of those illustrated books of Bible stories, one with a picture or two on every page. Remember how they looked to you: Nebuchadnezzar eating grass.

Hagar and Ishmael going off into the wilderness; those wonderfully mystical drawings of God speaking out of the fire or the clouds, with clear rays of light breaking through the mist. The whole story of the wandering of the Hebrews will have meaning; the oppression in Egypt and the triumph of escape through the Red Sea will all become part of your child's early knowledge. And he will never lose it. Aesop's *Fables* with those crotchety and human animals. The myths

of Greece and Rome, with all the grisly stories of Black Tartarus, the sunlight of Arcadian hills. The Norse myths and the lusty, bearded heroes with their great blond women. Tales of the heroes: will Buck Rogers in his private twenty-fifth century stand up so much better than Horatius at the bridge? Tales of the Kings: the Tower of London, the little Princes, and Bonnie Prince Charlie on the Scottish moors. Louis XI, Richelieu, the French Revolution, Napoleon. American History: *The Oregon Trail*, the settling of the West. The New England farmer looking up hastily from the family Bible when he hears a click at the window. The majesty of Lincoln and the horror of the Civil War, the World War. All from books.

How often every one has heard the comment: "I can't stand poetry. It just doesn't mean anything to me". But has any one ever heard a child say it of "Jack and Jill"? obviously not, because a child normally has a sense of rhythm: he is fascinated by those early repetitions in meter, the recurring sounds of a rhyme. It is not until he goes to school and begins to be told that he must enjoy verse that he starts to build that protective wall about himself.

Schools do untold harm by forcing on children little lyrics about death and sorrow, such things as Lowell's "First Snowfall" with its grave that is being covered up by the snow. No child is ready to dwell on the mystery of death with anything like understanding or sympathy; and if the elementary schools would only learn it, poetry would not die the wretched death that it does today with a large majority of its potential audience. Show us the two-year-old child who will not go delightedly through the pantomime of "Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man ...", and we'll say that poetry is not for him. The trouble is, of course, that there is almost no attempt to lead a child through the logical steps of progression

in poetry. He should have nursery rhymes, that goes without saying. But poetry shouldn't be dropped there only to be taken up and rapidly strangled in the fifth grade with all the blessings-on-thee-little-man syrup of the nineteenth-century American poets, strangled since the child has not a solid enough background to know that he is reading junk and that there is a lot of verse that is really good. Let him read some narrative verse: *Hiawatha*; some of the *Lays of Ancient Rome*; "Lochinvar", "The Inchcape Rock". He is able to read for what he likes. It is only a few years before the teachers and the critics will begin to point a bony finger at him, asking him how he can possibly have such opinions as he has. But for the present he is free. He reads without fear, and soon he will begin to tell for himself what is worth his trouble. He is building a background of a sense of rhythm and language; later on he will be able to look without terror at the huge panorama of English verse.

By all means, give them the nonsense books. Mother Goose. Don't forget Edward Lear's *Nonsense Books* with their limericks and long stories in rhyme. Try to find in the English language a more beautiful and tongue-enchanting series of sounds than the last stanza of "The Owl and the Pussy Cat":

They dined on mince and slices of quince,  
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;  
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,  
They danced by the light of the moon,  
The moon,  
The moon,  
They danced by the light of the moon.

*Alice in Wonderland*, and *Through the Looking Glass*,  
*Davy and the Goblin*, with its couplet, long before Ogden Nash:

I have a little garden

That I'm cultivating lard in . . .

Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, all beginning with "Once upon a time", Hans Anderson's fairy tales, Andrew Lang's rainbow coloured collection. Beatrix Potter's stories of rabbits and mice and squirrels for the smallest member of the family. *The Wind in the Willows*.

As the smallest member grows older there are *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn*; *Treasure Island*; Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *Story of a Bad Boy*. Judge Shute's stories, which have won over to the cause the most confirmed non-readers, of *Me and Beany and Pewt*. Dickens and *David Copperfield*, his favourite child. The stories of Louisa May Alcott, which for some mysterious reason are as interesting to boys as to girls.

My list could go on indefinitely, and so, by this time probably, could yours.

#### IV

You may have noticed that twice already in this article there has been mention of junk. The term is used without malice, for it is a mistake to try to regiment a child's reading to what his elders think he ought to have. That strange censorship of the last century which frowned upon the dime novel as being evil, when in reality it was the most moral kind of literature, only sent unnumbered little boys out to the haymow to read there in secret of the final victory of virtue and the heart of gold. Let them read junk: let them read the modern equivalents to *The Rover Boys*, *The Bobbsey Twins*, and *Sink or Swim, Do or Die, The Erie Trainboy*. Let them listen to the brave children on the radio, but see that they give a fair chance to some of the books that will matter to them.

Probably you are already living again some of the fun of reading those books which your children have never read.

Never read because there hasn't been time? No, there has been time, and there is still time.

It's all up to you, not to them, because you know what they are missing. You can mend that gap.

You can send your children away to school and college and to the world and know that when they are lonely or disheartened, they will be able to turn to books. You will know that they will be able to enter an intelligent conversation and not be stumped by a lot of things they've never heard of. You will know that they will be able to listen to poetry with a tuned mind, be able to enter an art gallery without fear. That they will not say as a young girl did in a Broadway play a few seasons back, when the sound of Taps on Armistice Day came through the open window: "What's that?"

You will know that they will not, some years hence, in an English class, look up puzzled and say, "The Cross? What Cross?"

## Teaching of Poetry

---

The human race has incessantly had its song and always will have it. It may not be hoped to die out. In our present century, however, its status has changed. There are comparatively fewer hearers or readers of it than in the long stretches of the past and fewer noted poets. Professors offer courses in the great poetry of the world, and one expects that they will continue to do so. Poetry societies exist on campuses in great numbers. Prizes are offered to encourage young poets and avenues of publication opened to them in local magazines. What has happened to poetry to bring its tapes from its old pressing? Diverse explanations have been brought forward by various critics; but I find myself agreeing with none of them. My own seems to be different still.

### I

Among various explanations that I recall at random is that of a scholar who is of the view that the poetic decline of recent times is more or less bound up with the 'waning of humanistic studies', particularly classical studies. A more conspicuous school of thought attributes the "epitaph of poetry" to the 'rise of science', finding the poetic and the scientific spirits incompatible, as the young Keats did when he proposed his famous toast, "Confusion to the memory of

Sir Isaac Newton, who destroyed the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to a prism", or Poe when he wrote his sonnet "To Science". A world given over to scientific investigation, to invention and machines, a world devoted to the cult of the realistic in literature and of sociological and political theory is not stimulating to poetic creativeness. This was not the view of Matthew Arnold, who thought that as science came to the foreground poetry would be needed more and more as an offset, would perhaps be relied upon to replace religion. And it was not the view of Tennyson, who loved to introduce scientific conceptions and illustrations into the fabric of his poetry. Another thinker, a political conservative, ascribed the shift from poetry to our recent dominant concern for the proletarian. How well, he asked, do proletarianism and poetry mix? The proletarian spirit is no more likely, is even less likely, to inspire beautiful literature than is the spirit of science and the worship of the machine. There is something to consider about in two explanations made in 1937 by H.S. Canby in the *Saturday Review of Literature*. Mr. Canby does not think the decay of poetry is for Carlyle's reason—that poetry belongs to the childhood of the race and essentially declines with sophistication. Nor does he hold that we are losing as a people our sense of rhythm.

We still dance and like music; indeed, is this not an age of swing-time? Nor is it because of the neglect of the reading and teaching of verse in the lower schools and the colleges. Mr. Canby suggested that poetry is suffering from that widespread specialization which has affected so many other activities—the division of labour, specialization in sport, in education, in manual training. Only the classicists read the classics, only scientists collect specimens, only linguists perfect themselves in foreign languages, only scholars from libraries. Only professionals have been expected to make music or



paint. Do only poets read poetry? In a further comment Mr. Canby stresses the possible maladjustment between poetry and our own era. In a time of emotional confusion when we are in doubt of the stability of our own civilization, in such a time poetry can hardly be articulate for the general reader. It follows old emotional and thought patterns, expresses only those which have become tradition; it attracts no more than does good prose.

Good prose is not merely easier reading (it was not once), but it is better reading than poetry which is not real poetry but only acceptable verse. To continue a brief sampling of contemporary views, in an article, "America and Poetry",<sup>2</sup> also in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, Leonard Bacon implied that the thinner quality of American poetry after 1890 is in part the cause of present conditions. This falling-off in quality came, he thinks, from a wish to follow European cultural ways, from too great concern for form and diction, so that an artificial, sissified performance was turned out, in which there was nothing for the common human being. The vogue of Imagism et al. followed and the present-day vogue of the unintelligible. These later vogues of poetry have to do with method and form; but method and form are not what is of first importance. And true pleasure, said Mr. Bacon, is a solitary performance, whereas the solitary in our contemporary life given way to the noisy and the social, to group pleasure. The new psychologists think us abnormal if we take our pleasure by ourselves. One might add that many now go in for the "choral reading" of poetry, though it is really only the lone reader who reads it best. He points out further that poetry is a very human art, and it is its duty to be beautiful. But our age is afraid of the beautiful. Mr. Bacon is sure that this condition is not permanent. He is surer than I find myself to be that poetry will return to its old ascendancy.



The obscurity and symbolism often affected by present-day poets also comes in for blame or for portest. Among those who believe that present tendencies contribute little to true poetry and limit the number of its readers is Elizabeth Drew. Too much allusiveness, the substitution of psychological process for logical structure and sequence, capricious use of widely divergent associations when, as so often, the central idea of the poem is stated nowhere in the poem—all this robs poetry of appeal. The cult of obscurity alienates readers. When poetry is not emotionally comprehensible except to the highly trained, it cannot keep its hold on the public. It may be left, as Mr. Canby suggested, to specialists and to the library. Though our age is widely read, the sensitiveness, the subtle emotional responsiveness that poetry needs, is lacking. A sense of its universal values has faded.

These various diagnoses do not seem to me to be the whole story or even the main story. Surely there is a practical, realistic factor to be taken into account, though it may well have been overlooked by theorists and idealists.

## II

First let us take a look at poetry in panorama, for the part it has played down the generations; this before we turn to the present to try to understand or predict. Whether or not we are as confident as are Mr. Bacon and many others who write on the subject that poetry has a bright future, it certainly has had a past, a long one that takes us backward down vast stretches of time to the beginning of the human race. For that matter linguists have suggested, especially Professor Otto Jespersen of Copenhagen, that the beginnings of language itself, the means of human intercommunication, may be found in musical utterance. All speech may once have been song; the two phenomena, speech and song, not

yet differentiated; speech not yet evolved. Among aboriginal tribes today speech is more emotional, and melody counts for more than among us. Uncivilized utterance is highly musical. Whether it is true or not—and there are numerous other theories concerning the origin of language—it is a fascinating hypothesis that from the first outbursts of primitive music and song, *i.e.*, from primitive poetry, comes our first human speech. When we pass to literary records, here also poetical language seems older than prose expression. The often-quoted eighteenth-century poet may have been right when he wrote :

Thus nature drove us; warbling rose

Man's voice in verse before he spoke in prose.

I have dwelt on the genesis of poetry, possibly coincident with the genesis of language, to illustrate the remoteness of its past and its fundamental importance in the history of the race.

Next, in this brief retrospect, let us continue to glance at the panorama of poetry, its place and prestige, between ancient days and the present. Poetry, meant to be heard, was still the leading form of literary expression in Greek and Roman days, as in primitive time. The fundamentally oral quality of poetry must not be forgotten. Among the early Germans, professional bards were in the foreground. They were the preservers of tribal history. They chanted of the deeds of heroic ancestors and of heroic fights of their own times. Before the days of writing and manuscripts, this was the only way in which traditions could be handed on. Verse was more easily remembered than prose, and perhaps for this reason it seems to have earlier acquired clear and attractive structure. In Chaucer's time, the late Middle Ages, tales were still chanted to the accompaniment of some musical instrument or read aloud before a group of hearers. Poetry

was still the dominant art form. It maintained its ascendance in the sixteenth century, a great poetic period, and it was still directed mainly to the ear. Drama was then in poetic form. Shakespeare composed his plays to be presented, to be heard, not for circulation in printed form. And nearly any character in a Shakespearean play may catch up a musical instrument and sing. Song appears to have had nearly universal popularity then. Though there was more reading and less hearing of it in the seventeenth century, it was still, two centuries after the introduction of printing, the form of literature that reached most persons, that attracted geniuses, the strong minds that craved readers and influence as well as self-expression. Poetry was still the form that brought prestige, and for the dramatists, remuneration. The latter may not have been great; but other forms of literature hardly brought returns at all. Thus we have come as far down as the eighteenth century and find poetry having a relative monopoly, less than it had earlier, but still unmistakably in the foreground. The outpourings of verse have been the key not only to the emotional but to the intellectual tendencies, the moral development, the psychic outlook of people, down nearly to our own time—poetry far more than prose.

The important period for shift was the eighteenth century. By this time the middle class had risen in influence. The reading public was enlarged and reading popularized. Not only the upper classes read, but the rising currency of newspapers, pamphlets, periodicals, and printed street ballads brought reading to those farth down in social station. Of particular significance in this century was the advent of the periodical essay in prose and of prose fiction, native English forms. The vogue of these new forms, the essay and the novel, attracted strong writers. We wait, however, until the early nineteenth century and Sir Walter Scott and his invention

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of the historical novel, for the appearance of works like his *Ivanhoe*, *Kenilworth*, *The Talisman*, for fiction reading to become thoroughly respectable. This appears to me to be the historic turning-point in the position of poetry. I want to stress this. It was Sir Walter Scott who really broke the monopoly of poetry, who ultimately wrote away its popularity when he turned from the verse romance to fiction. More than anyone else he has the historic position of the author who diminished its sales and so helped to dislodge it from its ascendance. Literary anthologies give first place to poetry through the nineteenth century. Those of the twentieth century give more and more space relatively to prose. The force of centuries carried verse fairly well through the Victorian period; but by that time its dominance was clearly waning. It was losing to the multifarious prose that had developed so slowly as a competitor. It has lost ground to the novel, the essay, to histories like those of Carlyle and Macaulay, written under the influence of Scott. Serious stage plays were composed in prose. And now we must take into view, too, the sketches and biographies and autobiographies and travel-book and the miscellaneous political and sociological matter that our presses pour forth in floods. The Victorian poets were the last to have great place, and even their poetry, in the context of the present, seems to shrink somewhat in depth and significance when placed beside the creations of the trail-blazing minds that composed *Oliver Twist*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *The Egoist*, *The Return of the Native*, in England, and, on the Continent, *Ghosts*, *The Doll's House*, *Le Débat*, *Die Weber*, *Resurrection*.

The profounder and truer vein in the last half of the century ran, not through its poetry as in the earlier half, but through its prose. Authors with much to say and on deep



problems chose at long last the medium of prose expression. They wanted several readers. There is no decline in the supply of poems; but fewer persons turn to them for what they read. Poetry societies and small poetical publications multiply. Poetry holds its academic standing. Teachers bring up their pupils on it, as they should, for it is an appealing form of verbal expression. It is, as we have seen, a fundamental form in literary history. But so far as demand for its production goes it is moribund. "Everybody known that poetry is a dying art", wrote one publisher. "Everybody in the book and literary business, that is. The news has not yet spread to the masses." It is only newspaper poets, such as the late Walt Mason or Edgar Guest, or columnists trying it for variety's sake, or writers of light verse for periodicals, that command much of a market. Or probably the chief market at present is that of those who produce the incredible stanzas crooned by radio performers, in which there are two staple characters, the moonstruck singer and his or her no less moon-struck "honey", both moaners. But this is not poetry, though it may command payment. It is not even verse.

I remember once writing a sophomoric piece that I entitled "The Literary Interrgnum", in which I tried to point out that there are usually "between periods"; or periods of transitio, in which the literary product is weak and uncertain. Old themes and patterns are dying and the new is not yet born. My reference was mainly to poetry. The nineteenth-century poets had passed and their successors had not yet come to the foreground. But I felt pretty sure of the future and of my word "interregnum". I was sure that it would end and that new literary kings would be crowned. They will be, of curse, but they seem more likely to be kings of prose than kings of verse. Are we to have in our century the major poets to whom Whitman so looked forward?

Poets to come! orators, singers, musicians to come!

Not today is to justify me and answer what I am  
for,

But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental,  
greater than before known

Arouse, for you must justify me.

In the past, disastrous war periods have often proved greatly stimulating to poets and have been followed by notable poetic performance. In our present war period there may seem to be a distinct popular turning to poetry. Some have thought that there is. But how likely is the product to be greater or more lasting than that hailed as significant during the first World War?

### III

What I wish to suggest as the major reason for the lesser role played by poetry in our day is the economic reason, the lack of rewards, the weakening of the old motives for turning to it, the undermining effect of competition. Disconcerting as this may seem, the practical or economic motive is a fundamental thing, to be taken into account in literary history as elsewhere in our world of human beings. It is recognition of this motive that has made me lose much of my former faith in an "interregnum" to be followed by a new glorious florescence time for poetry. In any line of human activity the practical side is important. Economic explanations underlie many if not most of the significant phenomena of human history. Whether we are dealing with politics, intellectual activities, even religion, such phenomena have in part an economic basis; economic considerations are of fundamental importance for their future. This is not to be overemphasized, of course, but the economic factor holds for art, too. Economic conditions must be favourable if there is to be high

development. Indeed, unidealistic as this may seem, it is the vogues they foster that make possible high development. They, combined with the right element in time. Shakespeare could have been the dramatist he was only at the time when he wrote. Fifty years before, the drama had not yet developed nor the possibilities of blank verse. Not long after his death the Puritans closed the theaters, and no plays were presented. Milton, too, would not have written on the themes he choose, nor in the poetical modes in which he so excelled, had he written a few decades later, when Renaissance poetic ideas had been superseded by newer and more prosaic ones.

We have seen how, for so long a time, poetry had a relative monopoly in the literary field. And we have seen, too, whether we like to confront the fact or not, how it is affected by economic returns. Why do geniuses write? What impels them? They hope for fame, prestige and for concrete reward for attaining it; or they have certain aims to achieve, to set forth their ideas, or they crave self-expression. That self-expression usually takes the literary form that finds most readers or brings surest rewards. We turn our endeavours into the lines that bring these, or we are never heard from. A potential super-football player born, living, and dying in Alaska could hardly attain All-American recognition. Nor a potential great writer growing up and remaining in a region where there is little culture and books are not encouraged. Men's wish to better themselves and to achieve security in the surest impetus to effort. When Shakespeare wrote, the poetic dram was the only form of literature that brought economic returns. He was a good businessman, too, and his acting and playwriting brought him economic prosperity. Had Dr. Johnson, Goldsmith, or Thackeray had private incomes, they would probably never have written much, or, in any case, not written what they did. When they wrote, they

turned their compositions into the forms having vogue and claiming readers. When novels rose to popularity, when it was they that brought fame and money and commanded most readers, strong minds started to turn to them and to cease composing lyrics and verse romances and verse dramas. And of late years the demand for magazine literature still directs activity into the kaleidoscopically varied though sometimes slight forms that these magazines endeavour to supply. My idea is, then, that poetry lost place as it had the competition of attractive prose, the latter better bringing greater rewards. In a recent article Professor George R. Stewart dates the decline of poetry in quality after 1890 and points to its complete surrender to the novel since 1920. I go further back by more than a hundred years for the beginnings of the shift. And now poetry has other competitors to lure the strongest talent and tempt the ambitious. The new forms of art—the films and the radio—are forms for which the test are perishable, as merely oral literature always is; and the fame they yield is transient. Yet they are tough rivals and their economic returns unmistakable. Authors of both fiction and drama now often direct their works toward recognition in these fields. What chance has poetry in competition with them? They reach millions where printed volumes of verse reach fewer and fewer. Why, then, writers may well say, bother with verse? Instead of the lasting statements of great poets, addressed to readers of intelligence, typical in our day is the flat matter so often blatted out by the mooncalf singers of the radio.

Curiously, our sophisticated twentieth century tolerates rhymed or semirhymed verse that could not be paralleled in preceding centuries. In the 1890's people used to think "After the Ball" or "Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl" pretty weak stuff; but these pieces were lengths ahead, in thought,



content, narrative, and expression, of various lyrics now turned out. I refer to matter like "Mamie, O Mamie, don't you feel ashamy?", "There ain't no maybe in my baby's eyes", "O how I love Dolores. Does she love me? Of course". Sometimes there are real poetic successes, like Archibald MacLeish's "The Fall of the City" and Maxwell Anderson's poetical dramas. Radio drama in verse may be the starting of something, a significant pioneer venture that restores somewhat of its old role, appeal to the ear, to the poet. But, after all, such drama can reach only the special not the general, in any case not the "proletarian", audiences of these days.

I know I have not drawn a roseate picture. I hope it is an untrue one. "If we lose poetry from ordinary life", wrote a critic, "we lose the dignity and power of the word, the moving eloquence of its cadences, the exaltation of language and emotion which transcend our daily realities and lift us into a higher world of the spirit". When verse comes to be used for fewer and more special purposes, when it comes to serve academic purposes mainly, it falls into relative disuse. As I said at the opening, poetry is the most beautiful form of human speech. That it will not die out I am sure. The language has rich potentialities. People will always wish to put words together musically, to give pleasure to themselves or their hearers, or only to explore the possibilities of the language. Poetry surely has a future, both for the expression of ideas and emotions and for musical appeal.

The teacher knows that there is no better mental discipline for the young reader than to go through it understandingly. To read in the true sense one requirement to learn to read poetry, real poetry, not fair verse. For that matter, the most attractive prose has never been written by those who cannot appreciate poetry. I believe that poetry will be composed and read and loved as long as the race

lasts; that there will always be poets and lovers of poetry. But it can hardly regain its old monopoly, attracting to it the best authorship down the generations. It has too great competition—that is the chief difficulty it encounters. It has the competition of an interesting and multifarious prose, late in development in literary history, and now it has the competition of two new and extremely popular forms of art. Possibly, too, there will be other new forms that we do not now dream of, just as the Victorians never dreamed of our sound films or of our revival of purely oral literature over the radio. There require be no pessimism regarding the future of verse. The select will always delight in fine poetry and the masses will always cherish their favourite pieces. One hopes from time to time a genuine “renaissance” of poetic interest and productivity. I repeat that poetry will always be with us, but I do not see how it can have again the literary monopoly, the supreme prestige, that it once had.

## Science and Poetry

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Perhaps no subject of speculation has forth more delirious nonsense than that dealing with the relation of poetry to science. On the one hand, the poets are told that their days are numbered. In the future, science will take over the truth-telling function which poets performed in the past. The poets, Max Eastman bluntly declares, do not know what they are talking about. But he offers them some consolation by assuring them that their task is not to furnish knowledge but to enrich consciousness, to intensify our awareness and enjoyment of experience for its own sake and in all its speciality and vividness. On the other hand, there are several poets and literary critics who have no intention of capitulating so easily. This is to reduce their level of aspiration to the nadir. Convinced that poets have a lofty mission to fulfill on earth, they make no bones about their irreconcilable opposition to science and their determination to fight it with every weapon at their command. Up to a certain point their arguments are irrefutable. The language of poetry and that of science are poles apart.

One is sensuous, immediate, concrete, warm, flavoursome, delighting in what is, and yet stimulating to the imagination; it is based on observation, fed on experience. The other, related to universals, is dry, cold, general, abstract. There is really no conflict on this issue. Who denies that this is so? No one in his right senses would stress that poets

must master the technical vocabulary of science. While some scientific terms gradually become incorporated within the language of poetry, especially when they gain wide currency, the decisive influence on poetry is not the scientific terminology but the scientific outlook. It is not so much the language as the philosophy that the poet assimilates.

No contemporary poet can hope to escape this influence, just as no writer can remain untouched by the culture of his time. Unfortunately it is dangerous to import ideas into poetry, That is to profane the holy of holies, confusing art with magic. The purpose of art is to arouse emotions which are then transferred to the concerns of practical life. This is a type of aesthetic theory, re-emerging today, which insists that the power of the artist can be effectively brought into play only when the subject is worthy of his power. It has been attacked by R.G. Collingwood, in *The Principles of Art*, as a false and barbarous conception which exalts art as propaganda above artistic freedom. More challenging is the attack contained in A.C. Bradley's famous inaugural lecture, "Poetry for Poetry's Sake" which argues eloquently that a poem is nothing more than a group of words on paper, a complication of sounds, thoughts and emotions. Those who believe in poetry for poetry's sake argue first, that poetry is its own excuse for being, that it possesses an intrinsic value, and second, that its "poetic value" is to be found in this intrinsic worth along, and nowhere else. Poetry must be judged in and for itself. For its nature, declares A.C. Bradley, "is to be not a part, nor yet a copy, of the real world (as we commonly understand that phrase), but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous". All this is of importance crucial in its bearing on the central problem: the relationship of poetry to science. For if poetry is cut off from its organic connection with life, if its aim is not even to copy



life, if it dwells in a realm that is beyond space and time, then obviously the subject had no part in determining the value of the poem, and science is rudely thrust out into the cold.

Pure poetry stands justified as the perfect union of form and content. It is therefore impossible to translate the meaning of a poem in any but its own words. Long before the critics formulated this congenial doctrine of poetry for poetry's sake, the poets themselves had been struggling with the problem. In the latter parts of the nineteenth century, the English Symbolists had fought against the intrusion of alien philosophic reflections into poetry. Poetry, they argued, must be "pure" and purity could be achieved only by eliminating from the body poetic such themes as were proper to science or sociology. Poetry should not argue. It should not state. mainly a matter of artistic technique, poetry existed for its own sake and not for some ulterior end. But these poets went further in explicitly recognizing the common enemy, namely, science and in mobilizing their forces against it.

William Butler Yeats, one of the important figures of his time, was drawn irresistibly to the folklore of the Irish peasantry as a fertile source of poetic material. Nurtured on such imaginative fare, he had no need of science and throughout his life remained not only unaffected by it but hostile to its influence, which seemed to him truly diabolical. Compacted of pure imagination, poetry, lyrical poetry, was a species of fiery enchantment, a mystical revelation. This is the aesthetics of "pure" poetry, which appeals to the emotions and the imagination, not to the understanding. Small wonder that Yeats admonished his readers not to seek learning from the astronomers, on the ground that "dead is all their human truth".

Thus not only the truth of science but reality as such is extruded as immaterial from the kingdom of poetry. Like Baudelaire, the poet, not satisfied with the reality around him, cultivates experiences of supernal ecstasy so that the rational order of the universe may be broken and transcended. Like Baudelaire, he comes to believe that poetry can give him the power to free himself from the logically controlled world of perceptions. Thus he is capable of revealing not what is seen and known but what nobody else is capable of beholding: the depths of the unknown, the glimpses of the supernatural.

Unfortunately, the materials of his art refuse to conform to the poet's desire for perfect purity; they remain refractory, intractably impure. The words he uses are charged with hosts of socialized meaning. The effort to strip poetry of ideas, logical meaning, and beliefs, is bound to fail, and if it does, then the problem of the truth-function of poetry must be faced. If poetry bore no relation to life, it would not have been cherished through the ages; we read poetry because we believe it does increase our understanding of life. By ordering and interpreting experience, poetry constitutes a criticism of life in the highest sense of the term.

If poetry served a truth-function, then it is possible for science to play a significant role in its growth and development. Not that the poet makes capital out of the common-places of scientific discovery: stimulus-response, behaviourism, electronics, the unconscious. What matters profoundly is the poet's liberated insight into the nature of man, his new and increased understanding of the world. If the modern personality has become four-dimensional, elusive in its contours, multiple, bafflingly complex, it is due in large measure to the experiments of many psychologists of all kinds. The horizons of consciousness were enlarged, and the writers

by their own explorations confirmed, sometimes even anticipated, the discoveries of psychologists.

If we concede that poetry is a form of knowledge and not a kind of magic, then we are faced with the task of deciding how this knowledge compares with and how it differs from scientific knowledge. It can no longer be assumed that poetry, unlike science which generalizes and abstracts, gives us the realness of reality. No, poetry furnishes a criticism of life in that it imposes an emotionalized pattern on reality. Poetry and science are both necessary for the integration of experience. The two should not be permitted to work in antagonism or in isolation. Science is not a performer of miracles; a thorough knowledge of it will not guarantee that the poet will write with greater imagination and skill; it will not make him a poet. But give a powerful creative impulse together with indubitable talent, there is no question but that a critical knowledge of scientific thought can help to make the poet's understanding of the world and of himself more extensive, more reliable, and more penetrating. Life will still be full of conflicts and contradictions and these will necessarily be reflected in his work, but if he begins with science he will be spared the necessity of believing that he is somehow the inspired oracle of the absolute.

Unlike the scientific investigator, he will not depend on experimental research, for his subject matter is not, strictly speaking, factual but interpretative. His imagination must still aid him in his work, but his apprenticeship to the scientific discipline will teach him the virtue of rational insight and understanding, of maintaining a more fruitful contact with the world of experience. Once he perceives that science is not a foe of the creative mind, he will come to recognize that science, like poetry, like all the arts, is a quest for truth, an adventure of the spirit of man. There is no phase of life



that has not been transformed by science, and poetry, whatever new directions it may take, must come to terms with it. Whether the poet consciously acknowledge its influence, ignores it, or resists it, he is still shaped by its concepts, its experimental knowledge and conclusions. He may pretend that it offers no knowledge which he can use in his work; actually the language he employs, though it is culturally retarded, is coloured by theories which stem from scientific discoveries. When, for example, he discusses human nature, he is advancing generalizations which fall within the scope of scientific inquiry. This does not mean that he must consult the scientific almanac before he can set pen to paper. The subjective life, the immediate qualities of human experience, the nature of love and grief and longing and aspiration, these are "true", regardless of what science has to say. There are many problems which still lie outside the scope of science. But to deny that man, though human, is still a part of nature is to subject him to a false dualism. Not that science removes all contradictions.

Whenever we talk about man, however, we are inevitably committed to some philosophy of human nature, and such a philosophy had better be rooted in tested, empirical knowledge than in mystical conjecture or blind faith.

Briefly, poetry starts where science leaves off. Poetry can humanize, make concrete and vivid the findings of science. Both poet and scientist are engaged in interpreting reality. The empirical truths of science must be given their aesthetic equivalents before they can be taken up by the consciousness of man. Poetry can do this effectively because it appeals directly to the emotion; it deals with the particular, the sensuous, not the general; the immediate, not the abstract; it reveals ideas in action, ideals incarnate. It embodies attitudes



and by so doing satisfies the emotional needs of man. Those who maintain that science and poetry are opposed in aim and content forget that poetry has been written which was based on the best available scientific knowledge of the time. Such poetry has often been didactic rather than lyrical, but there have been production of this kind informed with profound feeling and imaginative power.

The notion that exact knowledge is the foe of the creative spirit requires to be decisively refuted. Why assume that poetry flourishes best in dark places, that it is the spontaneous product of a primitive, untutored imagination, that the diffusion of scientific knowledge spells the death of poetry? Such fantastic theories, the fruit of unhistorical speculation, were propagated by Peacock and Macaulay. We have the example of Lucretius, a first-class poet, who in his *De Rerum Natura*, interprets the teachings of Epicurus, composing some truly powerful passages. His vigorous exposition of the scientific and philosophic beliefs of his age gives the poem its unity and its commanding interest.

Several centuries later, Thomas Hardy, in composing *The Dynasts*, afforded a striking instance of a poet whose point of view, influenced by the philosophy of scientific determinism, dominated the structure of an epic drama. A pessimistic determinist, Hardy beholds life on earth as moulded by forces that are blindly mechanical. The part which discloses the crucial difference between his poetry and that of his forebears is shown in his discussion of the monistic theory of the universe and the influence that is bound to have on his poetic practice. "The wide acceptance of the Monistic theory of the Universe forbade, in this twentieth century, the importation of Divine personages from any antique Mythology as ready-made sources or channels of Causation, even in verse, and excluded the celestial

machinery of, say *Paradise Lost*, as peremptorily as that of the *Iliad* or the *Eddas*. And the abandonment of the masculine pronoun in allusion to the First of Fundamental Energy appeared a necessary and logical resuet of the long abandonment by thinkers of the anthropomorphic conception of the same". This marks a revolution in the art of poetry. It is not here a question of the truth or falsity of the monistic theory of the universe but rather of a radically changed climate of opinion. God is dead; in His place we find the First or Fundamental Energy.

Here is the clear formulation of an aesthetic which excludes God completely from the category of causation. In short, those poets who have embraced the philosophy of science must reject the mythological or theological interpretation of events, natural or human. The test case in which this revolutionary transformation appears is in the substitution of neuter for masculine pronouns when referring to the First Cause.

Hardy has steeped himself in Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, but as a disciple of Schopenhauer he was constantly impressed by the element of automatism in human affairs. This over the main characters and events in *The Dynasts* broods the Immanent Will, unalterable, blind and deaf to the prayers of men, for it is itself held fast to the wheel. It is this steadfast awareness of the working of Necessity which distinguishes Hardy's poetry and gives it its characteristic stamp. The Immanent Will, though its purpose is sunk in unknowingness, determines everything that may befall. Everything has been decided immutably. It is illogical, therefore, to cast any blame.

Thomas Hardy thus offers a signal test case of the validity of scientific knowledge as applied to poetry. Modern poets like W.H. Auden may have a more thorough grasp of scientific

principles but there has been no one who was more completely swept away by the ideological currents of his age. For Hardy the new scientific outlook constituted an open sesame; it was both philosophy and method; knowledge and truth. It was not something to be absorbed and then forgotten when he sat down to write. It was a universal philosophy applicable to all of life. Here was the central principle that would unify his poetry : a vision of life that transcended the limits of the human, the temporal, the finite. It was not a philosophy meant for consolation, but it was the truth as he saw it, and he used it conscientiously as a standard by which to judge human actions and aspirations. The first step toward naturalistic emancipation lay in eliminating the teleological error, a pernicious source of illusion. This metaphysics of purpose was smuggled in by a mind that felt orphaned and lonely in the face of absolute flux. Some meaning, some goal, there must be, otherwise life is unbearable. Therefore God is real. Hardy punctured this bubble.

As soon as the poet begins to reflect on the human situation—and how can consciousness be divorced from feeling?—he is bound to be influenced in some measure by the scientific outlook, for it is part of the cultural atmosphere he breathes. As a poet he cannot help thinking. He not only cries out in joy or pain; he also strives to understand the nature of his predicament on earth, the meaning of life, and this demands an interpretation that is more coherent than a purely emotional response—if that were possible. If contemporary man beholds the universe through the spectrum of science, the reason is that science has become an integral part of his cultural environment, organic to his way of thought. Even when he rejects science, he is testifying to its mighty power. Poetry is an intellectual thing.

Tradition, however, is a great force, and there are still poets who write in the traditional vein on traditional themes.



Why this much ado about science? Had not the mightiest poets of the past, Shakespeare and Milton, written without benefit of the scientific discipline? (Actually, this is not so. Shakespeare and Milton saw the world through a perspective of beliefs that were current in their time. Science is not a brand-new creation; it is the best experimental knowledge available to a given generation.) But the modern poet lives in a science-conditioned world, his mind now has to function in the frame of reference it provides; his interpretation of Nature and of Man is shaped ineluctably by its concepts and conclusions.

Modern poets do not stand upon ceremony in utilizing scientific material that is helpful in their work. If psychoanalysis has made discoveries which highlight the dim recesses of human nature, explaining its contradictory impulses, its complex pattern of action, they will levy tribute upon it, and they will do so as a matter of course. They simply go ahead like a driver on a dark road at night, impatient to get home but held to a slow pace by the swirling mist; suddenly he finds the moonlight break through, revealing a long clear stretch of road so that he steps on the accelerator and puts on extra speed. The poet's primary problem is that of conversion : to translate the theories and facts of science into terms congenial to his art. The knowledge must be assimilated into beliefs, emotions, ways of behaviour and organic responses. There have been some notable failures in the test of assimilation, but it is equally important to observe that the process goes on triumphantly. A war can be won even if a numebr of battles are lost.

Knowledge of science, it must be repeated, will not make a poet. What we are concened with chiefly is how the poet interprets his world, what meanings he stresses, what faith animates him. There the scientific discipline plays a

pivotal role. For science can only tell us how phenomena take place and how these are interconnected by general laws; it offers no interpretation of their worth to man, no clue as to why they happen as they do. A neutral universe must be humanized, and this is specifically the function of the poet who has accepted the philosophy of scientific humanism. Every utterance implies not only an assertion of meaning but also an act of faith that the meaning is true. No poet could long go on writing if he did not feel that his revelation or report of experience is as true as he can make it.

Poets in particular, suffering from a traditional prejudice against science, imagine that all sorts of disastrous results will follow if they accept its version of the truth. Science, far from curbing the imagination or enslaving the intellect, is in fact a source of strength, a road to freedom. Whatever brings man closer to the truth is "good" for his art. It is the myth-seeker who nourishes the fiction that poetry expresses a transcendental truth superior to history or science. The benefit that the scientifically enlightened poet has over the mystic is that his feet are planted in reality. Science has given him not a mass of specialized facts nor a specialized vocabulary. What it has given him is a method of interpreting and understanding the world, a method of objective judgment.

Once the poet has assimilated the scientific culture of his age and trained himself to think scientifically, the question arises: Will he still be impelled to write? Will he still wish to be a poet? The question conceals the assumption, the bias, that the creative mind works best in a vacuum of dreams and fantasies, that myth is better than truth. The answer to such a question should be based on a review of the work of modern poets who have been profoundly influenced by the scientific approach. Robinson Jeffers,

Archibald Macleish, Kenneth Fearing, Louis MacNeice, none of them is "innocent". Each has been infected in diverse ways by the scientific virus. What they do with their scientific knowledge, the quality of the poetry they produce, the philosophical conclusions they draw about life—these are questions of a different order. Has their work suffered as a consequence? Whatever strength or weakness their poetry possesses, does not issue from their preoccupation with science.

For the simple cause that science is not overtly present in their work. No poet writes about science or incorporates scientific theory directly into his work. What animates him is the scientific vision of the world. Most of the smoke generated by the alleged conflict between poetry and science springs from a deep-seated misconception of the nature of science and what the point at issue is. Looking at the matter from the point of view of practitioners of a subtle and difficult art, the poets naturally tend to regard science as lying outside their scope of interest.

How can the poet be expected to concern himself with conditioned reflexes, glandular secretions, space-time coordinates, hormones, vitamins, chromosomes, and what not? It is a sheer physical impossibility for him to master all these sphere specialized knowledge. What is more, this material is alien to his purpose and unsuited to his need. The love of man for woman, awe before the majestic spectacle of the starry heavens, the loneliness of space and of the human soul, the protest of the conscience against cruelty on injustice, the fear of death—what have these universal themes of poetry to do with the discoveries of science? The conflict, it must be pointed out, takes place on a different and higher plane. The battle is between two antagonistic world-views; the naturalistic and what may loosely be called the mystical

or supernatural. If poets are attracted to transcendental doctrines, the reason is that these satisfy their craving for mystery, these confirm their intuition that there is much more in life than is summed up under the rubric of reason. For if there is a mystery that is beyond the comprehension of the scientist, then the poet becomes its prophetic interpreter. If he is not the voice of God, then he is the promoted vehicle of the unconscious. The French poet, Charles Peguy, asserted that he had no idea what he was going to set down at the moment of composition. Out of the secret places of his long silences were his lyrics born. Whatever word came to him had to be set down since it had been dictated to him by the inner spirit. So long as poets cling to such fantastic notions, there is no arguing with them. If they insist that their words have been dictated to them, then, of course, they are logical in demanding that every word, however, seemingly irrelevant, be set down without alteration.

Any touch of revision is a sacrilegious interference with the operations of the Holy Ghost. By the same logic poetry can indulge, as the Surrealists seriously maintain, in the fortuitous, the irrational; by subscribing to the cult of unintelligibility it can free itself from the burden of meaning. Either the poet in his interpretation of life accepts the scientific outlook, or he rejects it wholly or in part. Neutral or indifferent he cannot remain. In either case the kind of poetry he writes will be different. This is not a deliberate, conscious process. Poetry is poetry and not science; but since it derives its material from life itself, it cannot be divorced from the scientific synthesis, however far beyond it the poet may seek to go. In those areas of experience in which science can speak with some show of authority, the poet must abide by its findings. He cannot convince us, say, that disease is caused by sin or that numbers are endowed with magical



properties or that the stars can influence human destiny. No genius can cover up such egregious blunders.

By accepting the scientific interpretation of life on earth the poet does not render his creative problem any the less difficult; he has simply placed it within a new frame of reference. Science does not destroy ideals; it subjects them to drastic rational and empirical criticism. It does not work havoc with faith; it lays the foundation for a more secure and enduring faith. What it does do for the poet is to enlarge and sharpen his vision of the world, his understanding of man. Science works on the poet as poetry works on the mind of the readers—not directly but by indirection, by bathing the materials of consciousness in a new and more revealing light.

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## Future of English with Linguistics

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Hume wrote in his introduction to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 'that all the science have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even Natural Philosophy, Mathematics and Natural Religion, are in some measure based upon the science of man; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties... Here, then, is the only expedient, from which we can hope for success in our philosophical researches: to leave the tedious lingering method which we have got followed, and, instead of taking now and then a castle or village on the frontier, to march directly to the capital or center of these sciences—to human nature itself—which, being once masters of, we may everywhere else hope for an easy victory... There is no question of significance whose decision is not comprised in the science of man; and there is none which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science. In pretending, therefore, to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a complete system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost completely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.' These are the words of Hume but they might almost serve today as both an

introduction and a motto for the work now being attempted in general semantics. For what the semanticist endeavouring to do is 'Hume's task over again, namely, that of formulating a science of sciences'. Such a task has become, of course, increasingly formidable since Hume's day; nevertheless, with the progressive specializing and atomizing of knowledge, the need for such an integration has become progressively more acute.

But to support us in such a task, we have two resources not available to Hume: first, we have a vast amount of new scientific knowledge, including such basic advances as the electrodynamics theory of matter, the non-Euclidean geometries, the relativity theory of Einstein, Quantum mechanics, the chemistry of colloids, all of these completely overturning age-old categories and habits of speech; secondly, we have dramatic confirmation of the implication of the new sciences in our linguistic researches, which have established the fact that many of our so-called 'laws of thought' are merely laws of the structure of the Indo-European language. In such findings of science, Korzybski claims, we have the foundation of a new epoch in human history. The first stage of human development, from his standpoint, is that of the savage, prelogical mentality, with a one-valued semantics (or system of evaluations), in which, as Lucien Levy-Bruhl has said, 'everything is everything else' by 'mystic participation'.

The second stage is that on which European civilization has been based. There are sharp categories: 'This is this; That is that; this is not that'; the semantics are two-valued: a thing is either *A* or *not-A*; the use of powerful abstractions, such as 'space', 'time', 'matter', 'causality', appears with the development of vastly increased cerebral activity. This stage Korzybski calls 'Aristotelian.' We are, however, on the threshold, he utters, of a third stage: the 'non-Aristotelian',

non-Euclidean, non-Newtonian stage. The complete revolution Einstein has produced in physics is only part of a general revolution that must eventually affect all human knowledge.

In *Science and Sanity*, Korzybski provide us what he hopes is the handbook of this revolution. His system, which he calls 'general semantics', is ambitious in content, far-reaching in its implications, yet its recommendations appear simple and practical. It comprised at once a psychology, a unification of science, an educational method, and an ethics. As psychology, the distinctive feature of common semantics is that it regards the symbolic process as the fundamental differentiation between animal and human behaviour. In accounting for human behaviour it postulates the 'neuro-semantic environment'—the environment, that is, of dogmas, beliefs, creeds, knowledge, and superstitions to which we react as the result of our training—as a fundamental and inescapable part of our total environment. Mechanistic psychologies, as every humanist has complained, have, by ignoring or passing lightly over man's symbolic behaviour, made overfacile analogies between men and animals, with the result that such behaviour as is distinctively human was either neglected or crudely oversimplified. General semantics, as a psychology (or 'psycho-logics', as Korzybski prefers to call it), by making man's symbolic processes and functioning the central object of study, claims to put the Prince of Denmark back into *Hamlet*.

As unification of science, general semantics explores such widely scattered fields as the comparative neurology of animals and human beings, the behaviour of children and savages, the behaviour of mathematicians and scientists in the manipulation of their symbols, and the behaviour of the mentally ill, and seeks to evolve from such explorations general

laws regarding the assumptions that underlie sane, adult, productive orientations and those that underlie un-sane, infantile, self-destructive orientation. The aristotelian orientations, Korzybski claims, based upon ancient epistemologies and antiquated theories of nature, inevitably lead under present conditions to blockages. These blockages manifest themselves in personal life as fixations, complexes and neuroses; in public discussion, debate, and even in scientific discourse as the objectification of abstract entities, which results in inquiry being halted, sometimes for decades, sometimes for centuries, while men struggle over non-sense questions. The new orientations is based on the discarding of 'elementalism', or the verbal splitting of that which cannot be empirically separated : space *and* time, body *and* mind, intellect *and* emotions, etc. In discarding this 'elementalism', we discard that now almost inevitable tendency constantly to treat parts as if they were independent of the whole, and to treat the whole as if it were the sum of its parts. The 'law of identity' ( $A$  is  $A$ ) is also discarded as empirically false-to-fact. An 'infinite-valued orientation', based on the 'logic of probability', is substituted for the 'two-valued orientation', based upon the 'logic' of Aristotle. These and other formulations, which revise the basic assumptions underlying our language, Korzybski regards as the principles upon which the most advanced researches of modern science are based. Training in general semantics, he claims, will make possible the application of our newer scientific attitudes to problems hitherto found extremely difficult or insoluble. Such application will free the still struggling social, political and ethical sciences from the shackles provided for them by our primitive linguistic heritage.

As an educational theory and method of mental hygienics, general semantics uses the non-aristotelian

principles as a theory of sanity, to be applied to check and correct the evaluations we make in everyday life. By destroying the delusional words that all of us, in some respects at least, inhabit as the result of our evaluation habits, we clear the way, Korzybski says, for new knowledge and new orientations. Despair, disillusionment, doubt, and frustration are, in most cases, the result of misevaluations, which in turn disclose our improper responses to symbols or symbol-situations. These improper responses Korzybski calls 'signal reactions'—that is, invariability of response such as we would have if a chimpanzee were taught to drive a car: it would step on the gas at a green light, even if another car were in its path. Similar invariabilities of reaction, both to linguistic and non-linguistic stimuli, he finds, are at the bottom of countless personal confusions as well as 'philosophical' dilemmas. So long as all of us are in some respects trained in animalistic response-systems, we cannot Korzybski says, drive in the complicated traffic-stream of modern life without producing the kind of murderous traffic jam we now have.

General semantics, formulated as a system of retraining, is offered as a means of recanalizing those responses (both to linguistic and non-linguistic stimuli) that cause morbid over-excitations of the nervous system : retraining in such a way as to bring automatically into play the higher centers of the brain. The healthy human reactions he terms 'symbol reactions'/ Education in symbol reactions, whether applied to a patient in a consultant's office, to students in a classroom, or by an individual to himself, is bound, Korzybski claims, to have beneficial results, since it breaks those vicious circles, great or trivial, that drain our energies and arrest our development.

Lastly as ethics, general semantics bases itself on the fundamental features of man by virtue of which he is human,

namely, his ability to gather knowledge and experience from generation to generation, so that each individual lives his life dependent on the products of the nervous functioning of other individuals, majority of them unknown to him and long since dead. This human characteristic, so familiar that we rarely even think about it, yet so obviously the central fact of our humanity, Korzybski terms our 'time-binding' capacity. In the act of naming man the 'time-binder', he at once gives a functional, non-elementalistic description of man, and prescribes his ethics. Moral behaviour, so far as Korzybski is concerned, is that which promotes time-binding: that which preserves the knowledge and wisdom of the past, tends to bring human beings into agreement for the co-operative solution of their problems, and adds to human knowledge for the benefit of future generations. But time-binding is accomplished through the use of symbols. Without the recognition of time-binding as the chief fact underlying human accomplishment, we have paid too little attention, he says, to the symbolic process, and we have uncritically permitted its abuses and misuses to flourish.

We have been defining man in non-functional and elementalistic terms, either as an animal of somewhat superior type, or as a fallen angel, with the result that we have unconsciously alternated between two absurdities, on the one hand following animals (usually the predatory ones), and on the other hand, trying intermittently to behave like angels. With the recognition of time-binding, however, as the essential characteristic of human life, the study of the proper and improper, the sane and the unhealthy operation of the symbolic process—the study, that is, both of the normal functioning and the pathology of our neuro-linguistic, neuro-semantic reactions—gives the foundation for an ethics that is at once demonstrable and practical.



This is neither the time nor the place to evaluate all the other work being done in semantics at the present time : by I.A. Richards and his followers in literary criticism, by P.W. Bridgman and Bertrand Russell, by Rudolf Carnap and C.W. Morris and the 'Unity of Science' group, by Jerome Frank, Thurman Arnold, and E.S. Robinson in law, and by many others in several other fields, except to say that all have made highly valuable contributions, and that no one interested in the subject can afford to leave any of them unread. Korzybski's 'non-aristotelian system' however, appears to be at once the most inclusive and the most usable of the syntheses yet produced. However difficult the demonstrations and proofs of the system to be found in *Science and Sanity*, the principles to which general semantics can be boiled down are simple, and can readily be taught to students or applied to one's own work.

According to reports now being accumulated both by Korzybski and his co-workers, the effects of such retraining and application appear to be beneficial wherever tried : in psychiatry, as Dr. C.B. Congdon of the University of Chicago, Dr. D.G. Campbell of the University of California, and Dr. Hervey Cleckley of the University of Georgia have reported; in speech correction, as Dr. Wendell Johnson of the University of Iowa and Dr. Spencer F. Brown of the University of Minnesota have reported; in the study of reading difficulties in elementary and secondary education; in the teaching of the sciences, in mental hygiene, and in many other fields, comprising, as I am able to report from my own experience, the teaching of English. Besides, mathematicians, psychiatrists, biologists, jurists, sociologists, philosophers and artists have been provoked by Korzybski and the questions he has raised into new and exciting speculations. In the face of this vast increase of interest on all sides in matters of language, students of linguistics are in a peculiarly favoured position.

Many of the commonplaces of linguistic science are also cornerstones of semantic thought. Linguistic students have long been familiar with the principle that no word even has properly the same meaning twice : that when by 'meaning' we refer to the relationship of an utterance to its total context, there is no such thing as identity. Comparative linguistics has offered us insights not often available to laymen into what is meant by the structure of language.' Phoneticians have familiarized us with the notion of the absolute uniqueness of events, as well as with the process by which the human nervous system unconsciously abstracts significant features from unique *continua* of noises. In dealing with such terms as 'word', 'science', 'dialect', 'the English language', 'speech defect,' etc., we are constantly struggling against the objectification of fictional entities. In the problem of defining the phoneme, we have been familiarized with the character of the abstractional fictions, and through such familiarity we have been inducted into crucial questions of scientific method. Mentalistic 'causes' to which linguistic events have been attributed have been all but abolished by the rigorous empiricism of modern investigations of language. Students of the psychology of language, dialect geographers, students of speech pathology, have all been advancing the principle, in one direction or another, that the study of linguistic phenomena must take into consideration the totality of their non-linguistic contexts. In short, scientific students of language already have, toward the subject-matter which they investigate, that awareness of terminological pitfalls, that flexibility of evaluation, and that non-elementalism which general semantics regards as essential.

The student of language who studies general semantics will find himself convinced, I am sure, of two things, whatever may be the objections, corrections, or emendations he may

wish to offer to the system. First, he will feel convinced that the study of language is a far more important subject than even he has ever ventured to claim. None of us, after all, would deny that symbolic behaviour is central to all that we term human activity. Nor would we deny that patterns of behaviour are determined to no inconsiderable degree by the language we happen to inherit. Still less would we shrug off the whole matter by saying, 'If you improve people's thoughts, their language will take care of itself. Secondly, the student of linguistics will find it difficult to escape the conclusion that some system of general semantics, with Korzybski or without, is necessary for the integration of our linguistic researches with other fields of human inquiry. Such conclusions will lead to profound reorientations in our work. Linguistics, purposefully redirected in such a way as to throw light on how man's linguistic machinery works and what it does, will tend to become less exclusively a study of the kinds of noises man makes, and more a study of what those noises stand for and result in.

Such a redirection of our studies ought, it appears to me, to be seriously considered. The investigation of the general laws governing the functioning and disorders of the symbolic process provides first of all a basis for the unification of disciplines in what are now apparently conflicting fields. For example, the teacher of English and the teacher of oratory and debate can find a common meeting ground in trying to inculcate in their students the habit of making meaningful statements, rather than glib or plausible statements. Furthermore, such investigations will provide a basis for the unification of graduate work in English, in which, as matters now stand, the student too often feels either that the study of linguistics is an unnecessary intrusion on his literary interests, or that literature is an intrusion on his linguistic



interests. Again, general semantic studies will go a long way toward bridging the sometimes considerable gap that now exists between our interests as research workers in language or literature and the interests of our undergraduate students. There are few linguistic facts, drawn from whatever obscure source, which cannot, when fitted into a general system of semantics, be used to throw light on the problems of interpretation and of expression that confront, for example, our students in freshman English. When the relationship between our linguistic habits and our social, political, and personal dilemmas is made clear, few students will be found to be so indifferent to their own fate in life as to ignore what we have to tell them.

Again, to the investigator of man's symbolic processes, literature, no less than science, becomes a doubly significant study. Semantics need not be, as some appear to believe, hostile to literature and poetry. On the contrary, it can find in the literary manipulation of symbols not only a wide range of special linguistic phenomena to be accounted for, but also a powerful means of affecting the reader's neuro-semantic reactions toward greater flexibility and greater sanity. From the point of view of the general semanticist, the problems of proper literary interpretation may be regarded as special cases of the larger problem of proper neuro-semantic evaluations. Training in literary criticism, therefore, can assume a far greater importance in general education than non-literary people have even been willing to accord it. A general semantics should, consequently, in addition to awakening linguistic students to an increased sense of their importance and obligations, revitalize literary criticism.

## Speech : Its Origin and Nature

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A distinction can be made among three stages in the development of vocal communication. In the first and most antique stage the meanings of the vocal utterances are inherent in the sounds and the sounds are produced by instinct. In the second stage, meanings become related to sounds, and are dependent, therefore, upon the situation rather than upon germ plasm. In the third stage, which is found only in the human species, meanings are determined and bestowed upon sounds by man himself. Let us examine each sort in turn.

Vocal communication among some of the lower animals may properly be called instinctive. By this we mean that the utterances they make are direct, unlearned expressions of their organisms which indicate a state or conditions of the organism. And, just as the production of these sounds is instinctive, so also is their appreciation by members of the species; the animal hearing them understands them (*i.e.*, responds appropriately) by virtue of his own inborn neuro-sensory equipment.

Thus, vocal communication of this type is simple, elemental, wholly instinctive. The production of sounds and the responses thereto are determined by the inherent properties of the organism. The meanings of the utterances

are inherent in the sounds, which means that they are inherent in the organisms themselves.

In the second type of communication the meanings of the sounds are not inherent in the organisms of the animals concerned but are acquired by them. Thus, a particular sound might come to mean "Here is food" to a pig. We teach dogs, horses and other animals to respond appropriately to vocal commands. The sounds "roll over" are originally meaningless to a dog. In time, however, by means of the mechanism known as *conditioned reflex*, the dog learns to roll over at the proper command. The sounds have received a meaning for the dog. In opposite with Type I, this meaning has come to the dog from the external world, not from his own organism. To be sure, the dog must have a certain type of nervous system to be able to acquire new meanings in this way; not every animal can do this. But the point here is that the meaning of the instrument of communication, the vocal command, is determined by external circumstance, not by the dog's neuro-sensory constitution.

The meaning is not inherent in the sound but is acquired by it through experience. In the third type of communication, meanings are bestowed upon sounds by those who use them. Thus the sound combination *po* may be given the meaning "friend rabbit", "come quickly", or "unfortunate". *Po*, which is quite meaningless in itself, has acquired a meaning and an importance. But is this not like the sounds "roll over" that receive meaning for the dog? In neither instance is meaning inherent in the sounds. In both cases it is acquired through experience, the dog learning the meaning of the sounds as we learn the meaning of *po* or of *chien*, *hund*, or *syzygy*.

The two cases are indeed so much alike that the great Darwin argued in *The Descent of Man* that there is no



fundamental different between the mind of man and that of lower animals, but merely a difference of degree. "The lower animals differ from man only in his almost infinitely larger power of associating together the most diversified sounds and ideas", he argues.

Many psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists today still think as Darwin did decades ago, and maintain that man merely has more wide mental powers than his sub-human relatives but none that is unique.

We are obliged, however, to disagree with Darwin and with present-day scholars who share his view. The difference between the mind of man and that of the lower animals is fundamental and is one of sort rather than merely of degree. An analysis of this difference leads us into the heart of the problem of speech.

Man is able to use symbols; no other creature possesses this ability. A symbol is a thing whose meaning is conditioned by those who use it as a means of communication. A symbol may have any perceptible form: a gesture, a sound, a shape, colour, taste or odour. The most significant form of symbolic expression is, however, articulate speech. Sounds—or, in writing, marks—are endowed with meaning by human beings who are thereby enabled to communicate ideas with them. Thus, "See", "cat", "sweet", "faint", etc., are made significant by arbitrary assignment of value to them and by mutual agreement to recognize these values. But are we not back again to the dog who has learned to sit up and bark at the command Beg!?" Does not the dog learn the meaning of "words and sentences," to use Darwin's phrase, as we do? Yes, he does indeed, but this is not the whole story. The dog can acquire new meanings but he cannot originate them. The dog can learn the meanings of words, but he cannot determine what those meanings may be. Herein lies the

difference between the mind of man and that of other living creatures, even the highest. Man can originate and bestow meanings and value upon things as he chooses. We can let x equal anything we please, a ton of coal, ten parsecs or the honour of a king; red can stand for danger, courage, or a subversive political movement. In the realm of symbols, man can do as he pleases; he can assign any meaning to anything. No other creature can do this. Upon this unique faculty the whole of *human* existence depends and rests. It is the exercise of this ability that has created all civilizations of mankind. Before surveying the consequences of the symbolic faculty, however, let us analyze the difference between man and dog a bit further.

The dog understands words and phrases, as we know. He lies down, begs, and rolls over at the proper commands. But what he is doing is responding to a class of stimuli which we call *signs*. A *sign*, as we shall use the term, is something which indicates something else. We see smoke and infer fire; we see a red light and avoid danger. The meaning, the significance, of the sign may inhere in the physical properties of the sign itself and in its relations to the thing indicated, as in the case of smoke indicating the presence of fire. Or, the sign's meaning may be merely associated with its physical form, identified with it through the mechanism of the conditioned reflex, as in the case of the red light signifying danger. In either case, however, once the meaning of the sign has become identified with its physical form through association or conditioning, it functions as if it really were inherent in it. Let us now return to words.

Words function both as symbols and as signs. In other words, they are sometimes employed in *symbol* contexts, sometimes in *sign* contexts. The meaning of symbols cannot be perceived with the senses. One cannot tell, for example,

what the sound compound *dola* means merely by hearing it. When the Spaniards first entered Mexico they could hear the Aztec word *calli* distinctly enough, but they had not way of telling from the sound alone whether it meant "house", or "tired". Neither could the Aztecs tell what *santo* means in Spanish merely by listening to its sound. The meanings of symbols can be grasped, and hence communicated, only by means of a neural structure for which we have no better name than "symbolic mechanism". Similarly with symbols in other forms. We cannot tell merely by looking at a colour whether it stands for sorrow courage, or leprosy. Symbolic gestures do not betray their significance to the senses. We can discover the meaning of symbols only by means of symbolic communication itself, by the exercise of our neurological symbolic faculty.

To say that we cannot perceive the values of symbols is, of course, but another way of saying that their meanings are not inherent in them but are derived from another source. We can discover the saline value of salts, or the saccharine value of sugar, with our senses because these properties are an integral part of their atomic and molecular structure. But we cannot tell, by any amount of sensory inquiry, or by physical and chemical examination, whether these articles will sell for two cents a pound or six. Their commercial value is a symbolic value, bestowed upon them by society just as meanings are assigned to hat-tripping and green lights. The realm of symbols is, therefore, a supra-sensory world, so to speak, a region in which values live and function but they cannot be grasped and measured with our senses. To be sure, symbols must have physical forms, and these forms are perceptible, otherwise they could not enter our experience at all. But the physical form of a symbol is one thing; its meaning quite another. Symbols are, therefore, imperceptible

values lodged in physical forms. The only way in which symbolic meanings can be communicated is by the same means which brings them into being in the first instance: the neurological "symbolic faculty". Animals who lack this faculty can never experience values which can ever enter the world of man, the human being.

Symbols are created by bestowing a meaning or value upon some physical form. But after one has encountered the meaning in its physical form a few times they become so fused in experience that the physical form itself is able to express and to communicate the meaning. Thus we can coin a word, *bota*, give it the meaning "close your eyes". After a few experiences the meaning becomes so identified with the sounds that we can respond soon and appropriately upon hearing them. We can also distinguish *bota* from *boka* which might mean "shake your head". We see, then, that after the meaning has become identified with the physical form through the process of conditioning, we behave as if the meaning were inherent in the sounds, for we now perceive the meanings without senses. But the words are no longer functioning in the *symbol* perspective they are now functioning as *signs*. In human behaviour, therefore, words originate as symbols, but after we have learned their meaning they function as signs. Let us return now to our dog who "understands words and sentences" and see what the situation is there. We can invent a word, *pado*, give it a meaning, "sit down", and teach the dog to react appropriately to the command; we say "Pado!" and the dog sit down. But suppose a human being were our subject instead of a dog. Would the two experiments differ in any important respect? Not at all.

The human being might learn more quickly or he might not, but so far as the *kind* of behaviour involved is concerned, the two experiments would not differ at all. In each case,



sound acquire a meaning, the subject of the experiment learns it, and reacts accordingly. How, then, do dogs differ from men in word behaviour? Simply in this: words can only be *signs* to a dog; they are symbols as well as signs to man. Here is what the dog cannot do: He cannot bestow meanings upon things. He can acquire new meanings but he cannot originate them. He can learn what meaning has been given to *pado*, but he cannot take any part in the determination of that meaning. Besides the range of meanings which he can acquire is limited by the range of his senses; he cannot ever receive symbolic meaning because they lie beyond the boundaries of mere perception. Thus a dog could be taught to respond in a particular manner to the word *sin* or *holy*. He could distinguish between *sin* and *pin*, or *skin*, as we do, and react to each in a definitely prescribed way. But he could never have any conception of what *sin* means to us, because this word, like all other words, has also a symbolic significance as well as a sign significance and that can be grasped only by the special neural mechanism which man alone possesses.

Here we have, then, the difference between the mind of a dog, or any other of the lower animals, and the mind of man.

Man can originate and bestow meaning upon anything he chooses. He can communicate these meanings to others of his kind in the vehicle of physical forms. The dogs, apes, rats, etc., can only acquire meanings which have become recognised in their experience with certain forms. They can have no part in determining these meanings. And they cannot rise above the level of sense perception in their grasp of meaning. The significance of this difference is, of course, tremendous; it is the difference between a human being and a mere brute. But before examining this difference in detail, let us inquire into its origin. A man sees with his eyes, hears

with his ears, and smells with his nose. But what does he "symbol" with? Since the most explicit and important form of clandestive expression is articulate speech, some have thought that this peculiarly human faculty lies in the organs of speech. But there are no "organs of speech", properly speaking. There are, of course, organs of vocal utterance, but speech is more than mere sound. Some birds are able to reproduce the sounds of words, but this is not speech. Apes have the anatomical and muscular mechanisms requisite for speech so far as jaws, tongue, lips larynx, etc., are concerned, yet they are incapable of speech. On the other hand, the communication of ideas by symbolic means does not need articulate vocal utterance, as we know. We can do this with writing or with other gestures.

Given the ability to use symbols, to assign meanings to physical forms, we could devise a system of communication in which we did no more than move a single finger or toe in a system of dots and dashes. We could even symbol with our ears if we could move them. In short, we could communicate symbolically with any part of our body which we can move at will and which can be observed by someone else. To be sure, these non-vocal means of symbolic communication would be more cumbersome and less efficient than spoken words, but they are not less possible. The human species uses vocal utterance as its principal means of symbolic communication not because it is the only possible one, for there are many other possibilities but because it is the easiest, the most efficient and economical.

If the "organs of speech" are not the seat of symbolic communication, what then is? The fact of the matter is that we know very little about the ground of this faculty. We have not doubt but that it resides in the nervous system, especially in the forebrain. But it is easy to jump to unwarranted conclusions here. The ape's brain is very much



like man's, yet the ape is without symbols. Man's brain is larger than the ape's, both absolutely and relatively in proportion to body size, and is more highly convoluted. But man has no kind of brain cells or brain connections that the ape does not have; both brains are composed of the same kind of material and are constructed on essentially the same plan. How is it, then, that man is capable of symbolizing whereas the ape is not?

The only answer at the present time appears to be: more brain. Something differences in quantity produce differences in quality; additions of degree eventuate in differences in kind. Thus additional quantities of heat will transform water into a different kind of structure: vapour. When development within the egg reaches a certain point, the bird hatches and embarks upon a new kind of life. In somewhat the same way, we reason, when the primate brain had reached a certain stage of development a new kind of function became possible. This is a reasonable and valid assumption, but it does not tell us much. The fact is, we know almost nothing about the neurology of symboling.

We are not to assume, of course, that the transition from the sub-symbolic level to the symbolic in primate evolution took place suddenly. The ability to use symbols does not mature overnight in the child, but requires considerable time to become habitual and effective. In the same way, we may assume, it took time, perhaps thousands of year, for the evolving symbolic faculty among anthropoids to become sufficiently developed to receive overt expression, and still longer for it to become an habitual and effective instrument in the conduct of life.

But the fact that the transition from non-symbolic to symbolic behaviour in the species and in the individual is gradual rather than sudden in no way invalidates our

contention that the difference is one of kind rather than of degree. An animal is either able to symbol or it is not; there are no half-way stages. All attempts to teach apes, our nearest non-human relatives, to talk have failed. It is not that such efforts have met with little success; they have had *no success at all*.

Let us turn now to the consequences of the use of symbol. We have said earlier that everything that is peculiarly human, everything that separates man from the lower animals, all civilizations, depend upon the symbolic faculty. We shall now see how this can be true. Anatomically, man is much like the anthropoid apes. Temperamentally, too, man closely, resembles his simian relatives, much more so, for example, than he does the ungulates, rodents, or carnivores. Physiologically, in the dynamics of the living processes, man is fundamentally like, not only the other primates, not only other mammals, but other vertebrates, including the fishes. But in one respect man is different, and this difference sets him off from all other creatures and makes him unique on earth: symbols. It was a sound institution that led earlier peoples to declare "In the beginning was the word". Sound, too, was their appreciation of the creative power of words, for it was words that transformed an ape into a man, and the crude culture of a savage into the civilization of today.

It used to be customary to define man as the tool-using animal. But apes use tools with versatility and skill. Not only that, they can even invent and make tools. But the use of tools among apes is a discontinuous process, subjectively as well as objectively. Being discontinuous it is neither cumulative nor progressive. One generation of apes begins its career of tool-using where the preceding generation began. With man it is different. To man a tool is not merely an object, an instrument with which to cut or pound. It is also

an idea, a concept which is expressed in symbolic form. Thus the actual tool may often lie outside the range of his sensory experience. But the idea-tool is with him always. So vivid and real is the tool-idea that man comes to regard it as primary, as the ideal of which real tools are only imperfect and ephemeral copies. In this way, the tool process in the human species becomes a continuous process; and, being continuous, it can become cumulative and progressive. It was the symbolic faculty which transformed the occasional and discrete tool experiences of the ape into the continuous, cumulative, progressive process that has produced our civilizations in their material aspects.

The social and intellectual superstructures of all civilizations must, of course, rest upon a material, mechanical basis that has been wrought with tools. With a civilized technology there could be no civilized society or philosophy. Contrariwise, a primitive technology must mean a primitive type of social life and thought. The Tool is the measure of civilizations.

But if the tool is both basis and measure, the symbol is always the means, for without symbols social and intellectual life above the anthropoid level would be not possible.

Without articulate speech we would have no rules of social life other than those arising from desire, directed by whim and validated by brute force. We could have rules neither of monogamy nor of polygamy; for how could these concepts be communicated and agreed upon without symbolic communication? How could one know that he might have two mates, providing he possessed them one at a time but not both at once, without speech? How could one know that he could marry a cousin of the second degree but not of the first, without language? Indeed, how could we have any division of relatives at all were it not for words to distinguish



one from another? How could one know right from wrong without symbols? How could there be a right or a wrong? How could one know that the kid should not be seethed in the mother's milk if he were not told? Or, that he should not mar the corners of his beard?

How could he know how many souls he had (the number varies, of course, in the beliefs of man), which God to worship, which spirit to exorcise, and how to dispose of the dead, if it were not possible to symbol?

Instances have no end from one end of human behaviour (behaviour, that is, which is peculiar to the species man) to the other, from the simplest thing in civilization to a World State, a Universal Church, or the Philosophy of Science, the symbol is the *sine qua non* of experience. We can now see even more clearly the uniqueness of symbolic experience in the human species. It is impossible to bring any dog, rat or ape, nor matter how intelligent, to any appreciation of the significance of such concepts as *cousin*, *Tuesday*, *3*, *Kosher*, *money*, etc.

The most gifted ape can never know the difference between a Buddhist and a Baptist, that it might be wrong for him to eat bananas on Wotan's day, or that he may not marry his cousin. We could teach a dog to react in a certain way to the stimulus—, Santa Maria, or "twas brillig and the slithy toves", but we could never bring him to an admiration of the meanings they have for us. Our life is a thing apart. Our world, with its heavens and its gods, its institutions and its laws, its moral and rituals, its arts, philosophies and science, is a house built with symbols and in it we live alone. We may, as fellow animals, play with dogs or labour with camels and oxen. But our brute friends can never cross the threshold of our house and share our symbols with us. This is our own, our private world.

## English Teaching and Remedial Work

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It may be heartening news to many parents that this pattern is prevalent in many cases and in almost all of them it is the boy's lack of previous training rather than a lack of inherent ability which is causing the trouble. Let us go on with this typical case. The boy has applied for admission to school. He has been provided an Otis Intelligence Test, which is a written, timed test. He has also been giving subject tests in English, mathematics, and a foreign language or a history. His intelligence test displays him to be in the lowest quarter of boys rated throughout the country. He fails his other examinations and appears to be a poor candidate from the scholastic point of view. He is an outstanding boy, however, when considered from another standpoint. He is honest, sincere and desirous of bettering himself. He has personality, character and integrity which will eventually mark him as an outstanding man in his community or even in his country. In fact, he is just the type of boy we feel deserves the advantaged of a endowed school.

Our next problem is to discover what is back of the poor results on the placement examinations. He is given more searching test which allow us to condition whether those results can through poor training in his previous schooling, or through some "block" in his mental make-up which has

obstructed him from making normal progress. The first step is to check the results of the written intelligence test by giving him an oral intelligence test. In almost every case we shall find that a boy's intelligence rating will improve when the questions are read to him by the examiner. There is, of course, a definite reason for this improvement.

The average child is not a perfect reader. He may read very slowly; he may read inaccurately; he may even lack power of concentration to such a degree that he cannot keep his mind on one sentence long enough to get the meaning from it. Thus the reading ability of Child colours every question he is asked and does not give a true picture of his over-all intelligence. Imagine yourself obliged to make an intelligence rating on a test written in French when you had only a nodding acquaintance with that language. You perhaps would not be able to answer the simplest facts. Now suppose some one who could translate French translated the questions orally for you. You would find that your rating would jump significantly and be much nearer the proper level. We find that this boy showed a very low rating on the *written* test, but jumped to a superior rating *oral* test. We have put our finger almost immediately upon the source of some of his trouble. Without further testing we may tell the mother that her son has better-than-average intelligence and should be able to go on to do a higher level of academic work. One might think that our work is over, but this is far from true. We have merely placed the learning "block" somewhere in the *reading* zone. We must now attempt to find the specific cause for this "block" and remedy it.

The boy is next given tests which will permit us to find his grade placement in a number of fundamental learning skills. For instance, the boy may be in the eighth grade. We may find that he is capable of doing ninth grade work in



arithmetic computation where he deals only with numbers, but he may drop of sixth grade level in his ability to do the reasoning-type problems which bring into play his reading skill. His vocabulary skill may be at the tenth grade level, since he might well develop this skill by listening to intelligent discussions at home. On the contrary, his spelling skill might be found at the third grade level, because here again the reading or writing skill would have some play. One of the most potent skills is that of writing-speed. If his writing-speed happened to be below his normal grade placement the handicap would be great because so many tests are timed tests. Thus a speedy reader or writer will finish his test before the time limit is up. If the test is well planned by the examiner, the average boy will complete the test; but the slow reader or writer, though he may be able to answer most of the questions, will find himself only part way through the test when the papers are collected.

We have now learned that this boy has a superior intelligence-rating on an oral test as compared with a poor rating on a written test. He is well prepared in arithmetic computation and in English vocabulary skills, but weak in those skills which necessitate reading or writing—such as spelling, arithmetic, reasoning problems, reading comprehension, etc. In other words, the only trouble with this boy is that he had not laid the bricks well for a foundation for his scholastic work. Much to the parent's delight, as well as my own, I am able to say that there is no reason why his boy cannot be prepared to carry a higher level of study.

It is now time to apply the remedy. One might almost say that a rather mature student will go back into the third grade and take his spelling, and into the sixth grade and take his arithmetic reasoning problems again. Of course this is not literally practical, nor would it be a wise move if it

could done. At that age children progress year by year in these skills, whereas we have found that mature student under proper tutelage progresses by months, when he applies himself to certain definite skills. It is not unusual for a boy to bring his spelling, reading, or writing skills up from two to three years by grade placement-measure by a full summer's work.

This remedy seems almost too simple, but we must not lose sight of the fact that there are pit-falls to be avoided. When a boy of fifteen goes back to do the work at third grade level in any skill he is likely to feel the whole thing is silly. In many cases this has been the deciding factor against the necessary improvement which would eventually allow the boy to go on from where we found him. He feels he is too big a boy to be doing such foolish stuff. If he can persuade Dad that there is no sense to the whole thing, the whole programme is defeated.

## Basic English—What is It?

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Basic is a great excitant of humour. Hardly a week passes but the *New Yorker* or *Punch* or now Miss Macaulay, in the April, 1944, *Atlantic*, finds Basic irresistible. And I imagine that Mr. Ogden—himself a man of resource in jokes—gains deep satisfaction from this. To have given, in this distressed world, a new and seemingly inexhaustible recipe for humour is in itself no slight achievement. But there are other sides to Basic. This pained world requires jokes; but it needs a greater help still more.

And Basic offers them. It would be a pity if the humourists, through misapprehensions or malice, were to hinder the understanding and use of these supports just when they are most urgently required. Let us see what these helps are. Miss Macaulay rightly takes up "the use of a common tongue by foreigners among themselves" first. There are some 220 million people who have a good knowledge of English; and these form an invaluable stabilizing and teaching reserve which artificial languages lack; but there are over 1900 million of the others. And they talk some 1700 tongues. No man knows how many of these people are soon going to be flung suddenly into new international contacts. We are far more likely to underrate than to oversimate what the Air Age is about to do for us, and English of some sort or other will essentially have to be the operating language of the airways—with all that implies. Is it to be Broken English or Basic English? That is in fact the question.



A form of English which is a barrier, or a smooth and solid runway? Those who have heard Cantonese and North Chinese, for instance, using English as their bridge will not think "international understanding between foreigners" through Basic so remote an ideal. It is true that Basic is short in terms of abuse, in irritants and insults. But is that a disadvantage? Now as to talk between English speakers and the rest, Miss Macaulay claims to "have no wish to make elementary jests on this subject". If so, she must be somewhat at the mercy of her unconscious, for she does little else. Of course if the foreign learner knew English perfectly, things would be easier for him and for us.

If he knew *really well* the current English Miss Macaulay would put in a phrase book for him, we would escape a little trouble, but at what cost to him? Learning to keep sufficiently within Basic is really a very light task for an English-speaker. Learning to talk full contemporary idiom—whether American or British — is an appealingly heavy undertaking for almost any foreigner. Miss Macaulay has unfortunately not concerned herself with this key question and a key fact. She has been too busy passing judgment on what is or is not good English — generally a thought-free process — and shuddering at the possibilities of change. "The mind is ever ingenious in making its own distress", as Goldsmith noted. And she appears to regard "a laboursaving short cut" as a minor matter here. If she were to consider this key question and the key fact, she would find that Basic, far from being a danger, is a much needed protection to English. The key question is, "Which is easier for the foreigner: to achieve some general competence in English with Basic, or with the miscellaneous assortments of common phrases that have passed for elementary English? And the key fact is that the foreigner gets much further in his command of *correct* English with Basic than through any

other plan of study of comparable scale. He goes on from Basic, if he wants to, with a flying start. Basic offends Miss Macaulay's feeling for her own English. She does not like it. probably she likes scrambled English better? If she had sat through more classes in elementary English she would be better placed to judge. Or if she had taught English literature to representative foreign products of six years' hard labour at Miss Macaulay's English. She is attached to her *shall* and *should*—an ambiguous, insecure, recent, and regional development of English which can cause much misunderstanding. How confident she is that use of *will* where she would write *shall* is a "corruption" English.

This is the arbitrary attitude to language, ignoring alike the variations in the uses of these words made by equally discerning speakers, the confusions which are the only crop to be expected from attempts to teach such distinctions in *elementary* English, and the linguistic research of a hundred years. It well illustrates the source of Miss Macaulay's angry and apprehensive feeling about Basic. They come from secluded, entrenched and unexamined ideas about usage. After the disturbance *Basic English and Its Uses* has evidently caused her, I hesitate to refer her to *Interpretation in Teaching* for a fuller discussion of usage. She may prefer the linguistic ivory tower.

## II

Here I must take care to be clear. Basic is no enemy to usage (critically examined). At countless points it is governed (and as strictly as any English) by usage. It does not pretend — how could any *limited* selection of English do so? — That its usages are the best or superior to other usages which those who know more English would follow. But to keep Basic as normal a form of English as possible — under the terrific



hammerings a language gets from foreign learners — Mr. Ogden had to select the most important key patterns on which to insist. To try for too much leads in practice to less success — to greater deviation from Standard English — unless we assume that the foreigner is going to devote years of toil to polishing his English under far better teachers than are ever likely to be generally available.

I remark in Miss Macaulay a noteworthy absence of constructive thought here. The rapid spread of English is going anyhow to lead to a great deal of queer lingo. We in America and Canada have more than a little experience of this. We know, and the Armed Forces know too, what the crippling effect of widespread broken English is Miss Macaulay writes as a member of a highly literate elite. She does not face the present fact that a dauntingly large proportion of nominal English-speakers are without adequate means either of expressing their thought or understanding the thoughts of others on any but a narrow range of the most familiar subjects.

Basic, we are finding, can help them greatly. It is easy to denounce "a stunted barbarian vocabulary". That needs only a pen and a consciousness of superior cultivation. To go into the classrooms and observe the actual effects of Basic in releasing minds from stultifying confusions is more trouble. It is well to point to "our already deplorable use of our native tongue, threatened and debased on all sides by jargon, wrong constructions, solecisms, genteelisms, parvenu pronunciations" — though I wonder a little whether Miss Macaulay really knows how far such things have gone. But merely to list them does little good. What has been shown is that Basic can be a useful remedy where more traditional remedies are failing.

Mr. Ogden had to strike a balance. No form of widely useful English which could be generally learned in a

reasonable time could avoid some shocks to routine minds. His task was to prevent serious distortion of English without sacrificing ease, economy of vocabulary, and the widest utility. In any case, if English-speakers are to talk at all to those whose English is limited, they must make concessions and adapt their speech to their hearers. What does Miss Macaulay propose? That we should all learn all the major languages? Or that we should shut ourselves up for fear of damage to our English? Language is, after all, a tool which we use variously for various purposes, and Basic is a special use, no more. Exclusive language custom priding itself on being "the good English" is an amusing spectacle. But it can be a nuisance when it gets in the way of science, critical judgement, teaching, world collaboration, or constructive statesmanship.

Whimsicality, I suppose, is irresponsible in all these directions. And literary quirks will not much affect men of practical judgement who had, for example, the Chinese Air Force to train and saved lives by doing it through Basic. But when Miss Macaulay charges Basic with misleading interpretation, a reply is needed. Her two instances concern *angel* and *virgin*. She says that the Basic-taught child will be confusing an angel with wasps and sparrows because his Basic dictionary tells him it is a "being with wings". Actually his *General Basic Dictionary* gives this: "(Sp. in Christian religion) higher being, servant of Higher Power, gen. pictures as winged". Miss Macaulay has consulted only the little preliminary handbook for translators, in spite of Mr. Ogden's warning foreword. That is hardly fair play. As to *virgin*, the translators of *The New Testament in Basic English* were not, certainly, re-writing the King James Version; they were making a new translation and an *unmarried woman* is closer to the Hebrew used by the prophet than *virgin* would be. Miss Macaulay's sneers here somewhat recoil upon herself.

In all this, however, she is indulging in a fly's-eye view of a mountain. Here is a great contribution towards a more sanely organized world, a tested and proved means for making the coming diffusion of English give rise to as little strain and distortion as possible. This diffusion is inevitable, whoever wishes it or not; the war has seen to that; it is taking place already.

All that Miss Macaulay has to offer as comment are sundry examples of the obvious fact that no limited form of English can do everything to satisfy all critics, and some doleful prophecies which sadly contradict one another. In these she little cares how she shifts her ground. First, Basic won't work because the English-speaker can't understand (!) or speak it. Next, everybody will come to speak it so well they will speak nothing else. They "will pick it up almost unconsciously".

But why should any of us become limited to Basic? Who doesn't already speak many forms of English — in the classroom, on the playground; at home and in the office; drunk and sober; in the army and out of it? Teachers, nurses, parents, who daily restrict their language far more drastically than Basic would, don't lose the rest of it. Ultimately the foreigner — through Basic — comes to "conversing, reading, and writing in excellent English" while we go "down the ladder rung by rung. So great cultures go under, change hands". The bland patriotic assumption that of course the great culture is ours will amuse the foreigner. The prophet-critic has changed camps again. Miss Macaulay is a satirist. Her readers expect her to wave a witty whip. Often in the past she has attacked foibles, prejudices, and other modes of folly to good effect. But there she knew closely what she was attacking. Guesses about what may happen are not a safe substitute. Basic is a tempting field for such guesses. Relatively few people, as yet, have the actual experience which alone

displays what it can and will do. I do not for one moment suggest that Miss Macaulay thought, "Here is a big new subject to go for. Everybody is interested and naturally suspicious. It is easy game". Oh, no. She is Horatia at the bridge or at least among the geese in the Capitol. But to one of her readers it was a disappointment to see her talent go astray for dearth of inquiry into what is actually happening. One culminating instance: "The scheme", she says, "... is clear: they want the thing taught in English schools". I do not know of any who want basic taught (as opposed to studied) in normal English or American classes. For the deaf and the blind, yes. And I have seen retarded readers, who would have had to leave school with a complete reading failure against them, turned into sound and fluent readers in five months through Basic.

But no one is proposing to have Basic taught — as a first stage or as any stage — to normal English speaking children. "Taught" here is one of those compact ambiguous words beloved by controversialists which Miss Macaulay favours. It calls up horrid pictures of helpless children being drilled in Basic phrases to the neglect of the rest of their English. But this "scheme" which is so "clear" to her is just non-existent. A good number of people have found that Basic, as a paraphrasing instrument, has its uses. It can awaken interest in the resources to full English and the Basic words themselves. It gives some of the exercise and discipline which Latin translation at its best can give. So utilised, it already looks like part of the answer to many a current problem in teaching technique. And were they substantial, Basic could readily handle the dangers conjured up by Miss Macaulay's idle fears.



# 8

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## English Words and Achieving Success

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A wide knowledge of the exact meanings of English word accompanies outstanding success in this country more often than any other single feature which the Human Engineering Laboratories have been able to isolate and measure.

What is vocabulary? Just what the word signifies. Does the word enervating mean *soothing*, *exciting*, *distress*, *invigorating*, or *weakening*? For most well-educated persons the choice is between *invigorating* and *weakening*. Fifty-two per cent of the college graduates whom we have measured choose *invigorating* as the synonym; only sixteen per cent choose *weakening*, the dictionary definition. Does *stilted* in the phrase, 'his stilted manner' mean *irresolute*, *improper*, *cordial*, *stiffly formal*, or *vicious*? A majority of educated persons mark *stiffly formal*, but more than a third mark *irresolute*. Answers to the meaning of *scurrilous*, in the phrase, 'scurrilous rouge' divide themselves more or less evenly between *hurrying*, *desperate*, *abusive*, *frantic*, and *diseased*, with *desperate* the most popular. For *peremptory*, a majority mark *decisive*, but several choose *persuasive*, *uncertain* and *angry*. *Pleasant*, the fifth choice, is not as popular. *Linguist* and *glutton* are equally enticing as synonyms for *polyglot*. For *refulgent*, in 'a refulgent smile', *repellent* is most intriguing



and very bright next, with *mischievous*, *flattering* and *sour* all following closely in popularity. For *monograph* forty per cent choose *soliloquy* and less than twenty per cent *treatise* and *epitaph* each. The word *vocabulary*, as utilised in this article, signifies a knowledge of the dictionary meaning of just such words as *enervating*, *stilted*, *scurrilous peremptory*, *polyglot*, *refulgent*, and *monograph*. Not until one efforts to pick an exact synonym does one percept the difficulty. One may like the sound of a word and use it in a picturesque way without being accurate in its meaning.

## I

To measure the vocabulary of an individual, the laboratory uses a list of one hundred and fifty test words. Each is printed in italics in a short phrase and is followed by five choices, all of which fit the phase but only one of which is a synonym of the test word. The instructions are: 'Underline that one of the five choices which is nearest in meaning to the word in italics'. The words to be defined were selected by Alexander Inglis of the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University. His comprise was to include words which appear once, or twice in 100,000 words of printed matter. It is a general reader's vocabulary from which technical terms have been excluded, the test words vary from some that are quite easy, such as

*Thrilling* experiences—exciting, dangerous, disgusting, unusual, profitable, to others that are more difficult, such as

*Glabrous* heads—bald, over-sized, hairy, square, round, which only twenty-one per cent of college graduates mark properly. Since one-fifth, or twenty per cent, should guess the correct answer, the meaning of *glabrous* in practically not known. The test measures knowledge of words one

recognizes, not necessarily of those one uses. The words one uses accurately are, no doubt, fewer than those one recognizes, but there is probably a relation between the two.

Three hundred high-school freshmen average 76 errors in the list of 150 words. Seven hundred college freshmen average 42 errors. One thousand college graduates from a wide variety of colleges—most of them, however, in the eastern part of the United States—average 27 errors, and vary from the one person in a thousand who achieves a perfect score to the one who knows less than 50 of the 150 items. The college professors whom we have measured average 8 errors; major executives average 7 errors. Major executives score higher in this English vocabulary test than any other selected group with which we have experimented.

By the term 'major executives' is meant all individuals who, for five years or longer, have held the position of president or vice-president in a business organization. Such a definition includes both successful and unsuccessful executives, provided only that they have survived five years; it includes alike forceful personalities and figure-heads; but it has the great advantage of excluding our personal judgment from the process of selection. Major executives as thus defined average in the top ten per cent of college graduates as a whole.

Although it is impossible to define success rigidly or scientifically, it seems to be true, nevertheless, that a large vocabulary is typical, not exclusively of executive, but of successful individuals. It happens that in the business world successful men and women are designated by this special appellation, 'executive'. The successful lawyer or doctor is marked by no such name. But if, to the best of one's ability, one selects successful persons in the professions, they also score high in vocabulary.

For one meaning of success the Century dictionary gives 'a high degree of worldly prosperity'. The measured English vocabulary of an executive correlates with his salary. This does not mean that every high-vocabulary person receives a large salary, but the relation between the two is close enough to show that a large vocabulary is one element, and seemingly an important one.

Furthermore, the executive level which a man or woman reaches is determined to some extent by vocabulary. In many manufacturing organizations the first step in the executive ladder is the leading hand, called sometimes the working foreman. This man is in charge of half a dozen or a dozen others. He works at the bench or at a machine as they do, but is the executive of the group. The next step is the foreman, who may be in charge of as many as a hundred or more individuals. He does no bench work, he is not a producer, but devotes full time to his executive duties, to the keeping of records and to the handling of the personnel. The next step in many large organizations is the department head or superintendent or manager, who ordinarily does not come in direct contact with the workers, but handles them through his foremen. The final step is the major executive or official, the vice-president or president of the organization.

These four executive ranks represent four degrees of success, in one sense in which that word is used. One is *advanced* from leading hand to foreman, from foreman to manager, from manager to president. As far as we can determine by measurements, the leading hand and the official have much the same inherent aptitudes. They differ primarily in vocabulary. Typical non-college-graduate shop foremen average, as a group, about as high as college graduates. Department heads score higher, roughly fifteen errors, and major executives the highest, roughly fifteen errors. Whether

the word 'executive' refers only to the major group or is used in the broader sense to mean anyone in charge of other workers, it is still true that the executive scores higher than those under him and higher than other persons of similar age and education.

## II

An interesting sidelight on the high vocabulary scores of executives is that they were unforeseen. When a scientist expects a result as finally achieves it there is always the feeling that, regardless of the care he has taken, personal bias may have entered. Six or eight years ago the Human Engineering Laboratories tested forty major executives of the Telephone Company who had offered themselves as victims to be experimented upon in a search for executive characteristics. At the same time the Laboratory was also revising the vocabulary test, not with the notion of using it with executives, but with the hope that it might prove of value in education. One day, with no thought of the consequences, I gave it to an executive, and from then on was asked for it regularly because of the interest it aroused. I paid little heed to the results until one day an executive refused to the test. He had been obliged by lack of money to leave school at fourteen, and had earned his own living since. With no further formal education, he had worked his way to a major position. He had taken the aptitude test without hesitation, but vocabulary seemed to him so directly the result of schooling that he knew in advance he would fail. His own words were that he had made his way without being found out and he was not willing to give himself away. But in scientific work one cannot test only those who think they will do well, and we ultimately persuaded him to try the vocabulary test. He made two errors where the average college graduate makes twenty-seven.



Was it luck? Or was it significant of something which we had not recognized? The Laboratory listed the vocabulary scores of one hundred executives and parallel with them, the scores of one hundred mixed college graduates. The difference between the two arrays was striking. Only nine per cent of the college graduates scored as high as the average major executive.

Why do large vocabularies characterize executives and possibly outstanding men and women in other fields? The final answer appears to be that words are the instruments by means of which men and women grasp the thoughts of others and with which they do much of their own thinking. They are the tools of thought. Before accepting so far-reaching a conclusion several more obvious explanations must be examined and excluded. The first and most natural supposition is that successful persons receive words with age and with experience of life. Success does not usually occur early.

The successful group were essentially older in both years and experience than the common run of college graduates with whom they were compared; and their large vocabularies might be the inevitable result of age. To explore this point a study of the growth of vocabulary with age was undertaken. From twelve, the earliest age for which we have a large number of measurements, to twenty-two of twenty-three vocabulary expands steadily and at a uniform rate. Through this school period the score on the vocabulary test of one hundred and fifty items improves five words a year. From twenty-three to fifty vocabulary continues to increase, but changes no more in these twenty-five years than in two school years—not sufficient to explain the high scores of executives.

Generally, vocabulary is acquired early in life, before most men have made appreciable progress toward a responsible



position. The large vocabularies of successful individuals come before success rather than after. Age and the experiences of life may contribute new words, but certainly do not definitely in full the high vocabulary scores of business executives. The next thought is that effective schooling may be the source both of a wide vocabulary and of executive success. It is known, from the work which the American Telephone and Telegraph Company has undertaken, that there is a relationship between school success and business success later in life. Although not everyone who leads his class becomes a brilliant executive, and although not everyone who fails in school fails in life, in general school success preludes executive success. Schooling may be the vital factor of which the large vocabularies which we are measuring are but by-products. To get proof bearing on this point, we measured the vocabularies of twenty men who had left school at the age of fifteen and who had worked their way into major positions. They also averaged only seven errors. Their scores equalled those of the college-graduate executives. In the case of these twenty men it is their vocabularies which are important rather than their formal school education. Their large vocabularies are not the result of schooling and must, we therefore conclude, be significant for some other reason than as a by-product of an educational background.

Is, then a college background of no importance? Has the non-college man the same chance of becoming an executive as has the college graduate? This fact appeared worth determining. Of the major executives in a large industrial organization, sixty per cent are college graduates, forty per cent non-college. At first glance, college would appear to have done little, for almost half are not college men. But, to be fair to education, there is another angle from which to view this result. Of the college graduates with this

same company, more than three quarters are in executive positions, whereas, of the non-college men, well under a tenth are in similar positions. College graduates, in general average measurably higher in vocabulary than do non-college persons.

Furthermore, of the college group a considerably larger percentage are executives. One would like to conclude without further preamble that the vocabularies of the college group are large because of directed effort and that these purposefully gained vocabularies have contributed to executive success. Non-college executives, then, are those rare individuals who pick up words so easily that their vocabularies are large without effort. But there is one further feasibility which must be investigated.

Although the vocabulary test was designed to measure knowledge which must have come through books or by word of mouth, a high score may reveal an underlying aptitude for language. It may be this flair which is the contributing factor in both vocabulary and success later in life.

It should be possible to isolate and measure diathesis apart from knowledge. We have worked on this approach for a number of years, thus far unproductively. For the time being we must leave the conclusion of this part of the research in abeyance and admit that the vocabularies of successful executives may reveal an aptitude.

### III

Vocabularies may always be consciously increased regardless of the presence or absence of any gift. A knowledge of the meaning of each word at one's command must have been obtained by word of mouth or through reading, by some educational process.

Furthermore, with groups of individuals of apparently similar aptitudes, the amount of vocabulary added in a given

period varies with different educational techniques. At Stevens Institute of Technology the freshman class is divided alphabetically into four sections. Each of these studies freshman English under a different member of the faculty. Four years ago the entire class took the vocabulary test the first week of freshman year. The four sections average about the same in vocabulary, and there was no reason to suppose that, selected as they were, one would score higher than another or have more ability. Yet, when remeasured nine months later, two of the sections had improved more than average academic freshmen, one section had improved only half this amount, and the fourth had retrogressed slightly.

The improvement of one section may have been due to the fact that the instructor was interested in the vocabulary test and its implications. The important fact is that differences in vocabulary improvement were caused by differences in teaching techniques—in other words, that an improvement in vocabulary score can be produced by education.

Those boys and girls whom the Laboratory has measured and urged to better their vocabularies, and then remeasured at the end of two or three years, have shown more than average improvement. Here again vocabulary is induced independent of aptitude. It is for this reason that the Human Engineering Laboratories, in helping a youngster to find himself and start in the right direction, use a vocabulary test in lieu of a general intelligence test.

We come now to the question of whether or not that increment of vocabulary directly due to educational stimulation contributes to success. The four sections of the freshman class at Stevens Institute of Technology to which reference has been made, which took freshman English with different members of the faculty and improved different amounts in vocabulary, were followed to see the effect of

these new vocabularies on school work the next year. The four sections averaged nearly the same in school marks freshman year. Sophomore year the two sections which had enlarged their vocabularies the previous year showed general gain in all school subjects—not strikingly, not enough to prove the point once and for all time, but enough to suggest that a vocabulary acquired consciously reflects in general school improvement the next year.

It is always possible that the improvement in school work was due to inspired teaching, to added incentive, but if this were true it would seem as if the improvement in school work should appear immediately freshman year, whereas it did not appear until sophomore year after the vocabulary had been acquired. This seems to indicate that it is the additional words themselves which are the tools used the next year, that words are important in and for themselves.

#### IV

Granted that diction is important, and many would agree without elaborate proof of the point, how, from the standpoint of the school, can it best be given; and, from that of the individual, how best achieved? Is it a knowledge of Latin and Greek which lays a sound foundation for a real understanding of words? Or is it constant reading? Or the assiduous perusal of the dictionary? Probably all contribute; as yet we have found no straight and easy road.

In the search for a road to vocabulary we have unearthed several facts which throw light on the learning process. One of these, which, if rightly interpreted, may prove to be of far-reaching importance to education, is that vocabulary advances with an almost unbroken front. The words at the command of an individual are not a miscellany called from hither and yon. With a very few exceptions



they are all of the words of the dictionary up of those of an order of difficulty at which his vocabulary stops abruptly, and almost no words beyond. In the revised form of the test which is now available for school use, the items are arranged in order of difficulty as conditioned by actual test results. The first fifteen or twenty words of the test are known to the average high-school freshman or sophomore. The next thirty to forty are on the border line of his knowledge. Some he recognizes, other are vaguely familiar, and others he has not yet encountered. The balance are so far beyond him that he marks correctly no more than the one in five which he guesses by pure chance. For convenience of scoring, the words are divided into ten groups of regularly increasing difficulty. One who knows the words of Group II, second in difficulty, almost invariably marks correctly every word of Group I. Another youngster who may know the words of, let us say, Group VI rarely fails on a single word in any of the first five easier groups. Similarly, one who fails on twelve of the fifteen words in any one group—that is, marks correctly only the one word in five which he guesses—almost never knows a word in any more difficult group.

There are not, as we had expected, stray words in the difficult part which one who fails earlier in the test has stumbled upon and remembered. These unusual words, if previously encountered as they must have been in reading and conversation, are too far beyond the point he had reached to make any lasting impression. The one exception to this rule is the foreign student who may know difficult words because of their similarity to his own language, but miss much easier ones. Thus the Southern European often marks correctly such difficult words as *cephalic*, *garrulity*, and *piscatorial*, because of knowledge of Italian and French, but fails to know much easier words of Old English origin, such



as, for example, *knack*, *blotch* and *cope*. In the region where learning is taking place, the commonest error is the confusion of a word with its exact opposite. Among seventh- and eighth-grade and first-year high-school pupils, nearly a third mark *found guilty* as the correct meaning of *acquitted*. *Upright* is the most popular misconception for the meaning of *reclining*; and, strange as it may appear, *neat* is the commonest misconception of *untidy*. The seventh-grade youngster berated for keeping an untidy room quite often clearly receives the impression that he is too orderly.

The failing is not limited to the high-school group. For *incontrovertible* the correct answer *indisputable* is usually marked by college men, but of the remaining four choices *unsound* is by far most popular. In the phrase 'You *allay* my fear'—where the five choices are *justify*, *calm*, *arouse*, *increase* and *confirm*—*calm* is usually answered by the educated group, but *arouse* is next most popular. In the phrase 'He *retracts* his criticism,' *withdraws* is the correct answer and *repeats* his wrath, *poured forth* is correct and *restrained* is the commonest misapprehension. One need but turn to words of which one is not very certain to see how difficult it is to distinguish opposites. One evening at dinner with a delightful Dean of education, we fell to discussing this question. He recognized *cathode* and *anode* instantly as electrical terms designating the two poles, but hesitated a moment before saying which was which. *Port* and *starboard* he accepted he had never straightened out and resorted to some such phrase as 'Jack left port'. *Gee* and *haw* were beyond him. He surmised that they meant *up* and *down*, but said frankly he did not know the words. When told that they were used in ploughing, he was very interested, but did not care at all which was which. He was taking the first step in the learning process placing them in their correct environment. The fifty-two per

cent of college graduates who choose *invigorating* as the meaning of *enervating* are on the verge of knowing the word. The dictum of modern education, never to teach what a thing is not, has probably come from a realization of this confusion of opposites. The confusion seems, however, to be a natural step in the learning process. In the study of human beings the factors involved are so numerous and so intertwined with one another that the experimenter, in unraveling the strands, must pause periodically to make certain that he is progressing. What then has been discovered?

An exact and wide vocabulary is an important concomitant of success. So much is known. Furthermore, such a vocabulary can be received. It increases as long as an individual remains in school or college, but without conscious effort does not change materially thereafter.

There might be some little difference between a natural vocabulary picked up at home, at meals, and in reading, and one gained by a study of the dictionary. The latter may not be as valuable as the former. But there is nothing to show that it is harmful and the balance of evidence at the moment suggests that such a consciously, even laboriously, achieved vocabulary is an active asset.

## Relation of Vocabulary with Intelligence

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Justification for the use of tests for the measurement of intelligence would be more convincing to some if a suitable and widely agreed upon definition of intelligence could be found. There are some who argue that intelligence-testing should be postponed until the nature of intelligence is known. Such a position is untenable. The psychologist is, in some respects, not much worse off in the field of measurement than is the physicist. The latter is still unable to provide a complete definition of the nature of electricity, yet the measurements of its functions are adequate in terms of the assumptions upon which they are based. Besides, through his endeavours to measure electricity incomplete though they be in some respects, the physicist is probably closer to a statement about the nature of electricity than he would be had he refused to use the limited possibilities of measurement available to him.

The development of a mental scale by Alfred Binet in 1905 marks the starting of intelligence testing as we know it today, and his scale—the Binet-Simon Scale—is the prototype of the best modern scales for the measurement of common intelligence. Stimulated by the success of Binet, investigators in the United States and elsewhere developed and standardized mental scales proper to their cultural



situation. The success of the army group scales in 1917, when 1,750,000 army personnel were classified by the use of mental tests, led to the wide usage of tests in educational and industrial spheres. The application of tests to educational, industrial and military situations has produced measures which have proved useful in educational division, the selection of personnel, and in the diagnosis of mental defect. However, their wholesale application and interpretation by persons whose enthusiasm has often exceeded their wisdom has produced in the layman, and even in the college instructor, some measure of confusion and, not infrequently, and unfortunate degree of scepticism.

Some degree of confusion in the application of mental tests and in the interpretation of results is due to the nominative use of the term "intelligence". Such usage is perhaps a legacy of "faculty" psychology; terms like "emotion", "idea", "thought" and "habit" are used as if they were entities instead of functions. Reification is common in all the sciences. The layman speaks of "force", "gravity", "weight", "magnetism" etc., as if they were entities or things; and he believes that the measurement of these is direct. Not so the physicist who is fully aware the most of his methods of measurement must employ inference.

Thus, temperature is inferred from the length of a column of mercury; weight from the tension of a calibrated spring; electricity from the rotation of an armature; concentration of sugar in solution from the rotation of a beam of polarized light. The successful measurement of physical functions by the inferential method is sufficient justification for the application by the psychologist of the same method in the field of mental measurement. The intelligence test, then, is not a direct measurement of intelligence *quantity*; it is the development of standardized conditions from which

intelligence can be inferred from its manifestations in behaviour. Without sufficient assumptive bases, success in measurement in any field, would depend upon happy accident. Eight decades of scientific research have proposed so many assumptions with respect to intelligence. Ebbinghaus suggested that "intellectual ability consists in the elaboration of a whole into its worth and meaning by means of combination, correction and completion of several kindred relationship".

Meumann suggested that intellectual ability is the "power of independent and creative elaboration of new products from the psychic material given by the senses". Binet, the originator of the modern intelligence test, believed that intelligent behaviour is characterized by the ability to select and maintain a definite psychic direction, by the ability to make adaptations leading to a needed end, and by the ability to criticize one's own behaviour. Spearman regarded intelligence as the ability to educe relationships and correlations. In a symposium on intelligence in 1921, a number of psychologists contributed their views. These phrases are common: ability to make good responses; capacity for abstract thinking; ability to adjust to the environment; ability to adapt to relatively new situations. Through these statements, there is a common thread of meaning. The power of creation and elaboration of wholes; the capacity for adaptation; the ability to handle abstractions; these are functions of the individual's apprehension of relationships. In every behaviour response, the degree of success or failure will vary with the ability to educe relationships, whether the latter be concrete or abstract. The measure of intelligent behaviour, then, will be the individual's successes or failures in the education, the apprehension, and the reconstruction of relationships. It should be clear that this is no definition



of intelligence, but a description of its manifestations. It is based upon the assumption that there is a relationship between intelligence—whatever that may eventually prove to be—and behavioural; and that observation of the latter under controlled conditions makes possible certain inferences with respect to the former.

If these assumptions be accepted, namely, that measures of intelligence are inferred from its manifestations, and that intelligent behaviour is concomitant with ability to educe relationships, the plan of the intelligence test is plain. It is not possible to observe all of the behaviour of all individuals, therefore the test constructor selects a sample of behaviour items which are typical of the culture in which he proposes to use the test.

It has already been pointed out that intelligence tests measure, not intelligence as such, but its manifestations in behaviour. It is clear that these manifestations will vary with the culture. The manifestations of intelligence at a given level in Samoa will vary greatly from the manifestation of intelligence at an equal level in Alaska. It is important to remember that samples of behaviour items typical of one culture need not be typical of any other; therefore a test standardized on one culture may not be applied to individuals or groups in another culture unless it can be shown that the latter culture is in essential respects comparable to the former. This is equally true of differences within cultures, where these differences are sufficiently great. One could put little faith in results of an intelligence test standardized on a selected group of children from some privileged urban area when it is applied to a group of culturally underprivileged children in a remote rural area.

It would be unfortunate if the foregoing paragraph gave the impression that intelligence tests are but another form of

scholastic aptitude test. Intelligence in any culture will manifest itself in directions which serve the needs of the individual. In those regions in which long periods of schooling are customary, the commonly educed relationships will obviously include, *inter alia*, much material which can be regarded as part of the products of schooling. It is equally true that there will be wide differences between individuals in that culture in respect of the amount of school material acquired and the speed with which it is acquired even when all have relative equal opportunity for education. Such differences will show upon the results of a well constructed intelligence test. From this point of view, the intelligence test is a comparing device; it compares the manifestations of the intelligence of an individual with that of the group of which he is a member. The intelligence scale is a relative measure; its unit of measurement is relative and not absolute. The intelligence quotient is a ratio of the mental age as measured by the test to the chronological age; it is the result of comparing the intelligence of the individual as manifested by his behaviour under carefully controlled conditions with that of a comparable group under similar conditions.

There is nothing unique in the method of using comparisons as a basis of measurement. Resistors, capacitances, temperatures and sound levels, to mention but a few, as measured by comparison. The extent to which intelligence tests will measure intelligent behaviour will depend, however, upon the evaluation of the term 'measure'. If, by 'measure' is assumed a strict dichotomy into 'measure perfectly' and 'does not measure perfectly', then the psychologist will agree that tests do not measure perfectly. But no measuring device measures perfectly. There are errors of measurement in the most carefully designed and constructed physical measuring devices, such as barometers, thermometers, voltmeters and

so on. These, however, are not discarded as worthless; they are used to measure and their results are interpreted in terms of their known errors of measurement. The psychologist has been able to develop statistical checks which enable him to compute errors of measurement, and interpret his results in terms thereof. One manifestation of intelligence is the extent to which an individual can enter into verbal communication with others of his group. The proof that has accumulated points to a positive correlation between intelligence test scores and size of vocabulary. Terman and Merrill state that "it (the vocabulary test) agrees to a high degree with the mental age rating on the scale as a whole; correlations for single age groups range from .65 to .91 with an average of .81". In his careful statistical analysis of the Stanford-Binet Scale — one of the best of the individual intelligence tests — McNemar says that the "magnitude of these correlations (between vocabulary vocabulary test alone constitutes as good rough measure of intelligence". Wechsler found that "the correlation ... (between vocabulary test scores and the total mental age scores) indicates that the vocabulary test alone constitutes a good rough measure of intelligence. Wechsler found that "the correlation.... (between the vocabulary test scores and the total score) on the rest of the scale is .85".

The relationship between intelligence score and vocabulary score is great, but it is not perfect. If it were, the mathematical value would be  $-1.00$  or  $+1.00$ . Using the average value of .81 it is feasible to state that while the intelligence test score and the vocabulary test score are related, no less than 58% of the total variables which determine the total intelligence test score are unaccounted for. Psychologists have recognized the value of the vocabulary test in a scale of intelligence, and they have not been unmindful of its limitations. For this cause they have



comprised tests which do not depend upon vocabulary in the hope that by this means they would include some of the variables not included by the use of the vocabulary test. Further circumstantial evidence on the relationship between mental function and vocabulary comes from some of the investigations concerned with mental deterioration. The evidence is sufficiently impressive to warrant the use of functional vocabulary as at least one of the measures for the discrimination of mental deterioration. It should be emphasized that the psychologists who employs the vocabulary test is interested mainly in functional language. His interest is not in the bare skeletal aspect of words, but in their relational values. Terman and Merrill insist that "it is potent for the examiner to percept that the purpose of this vocabulary test is to determine whether the subject knows the meaning of the word, not whether he can give a completely logical definition".

It should be noted that in some tests, partial credits are given in accordance with the richness of the meaning expressed by the subject. The psychologist in his construction and use of the vocabulary test eschews the test which needs simple recall of dictionary meaning in favour of the one in which the subject is required to manifest intelligence through his comprehension of the relationship of the word as utilised in a meaningful language situation. Sufficient evidence has accumulated to demonstrate that intelligence is manifested in the use of functional language, and that vocabulary — qualitatively and quantitatively — is one important measure of intelligence. The acceptance of this premise does not justify the acceptance of its converse, namely, that by increasing vocabulary one may increase intelligence. This latter statement may be the result of faulty interpretation of the coefficient of correlation. There is a correlation of about .85

between vocabulary test scores and antire intelligence test scores. The mathematical concept, coefficient of correlation, may be interpreted as a mathematical measure of relationship, but it comprises no warranty for assuming *causal* relationship. Which of the related measures is cause and which effect is a matter for logic do not mathematics. The psychologist does not claim that success in college and life is causally related to size of vocabulary; to do so would be to fall victim of the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy. What he does claim, however, is that both richness of vocabulary and success in college and life are manifestations of the intellectual level of the individual; there is a concomitant but not causal relationship between richness of vocabulary and success, not because a vocabulary makes inevitably for success, but because both vocabulary and success are feasible only in those individuals in whom there is the essential genetic basis for a high level of intelligence.



# 10

## Style and Correctness and Use of Grammar

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Before school age, children in the best homes sometimes catch and correct their use of singular for plural verb forms. The children of privileged families enter school utilising correct number and tense forms of verbs, proper case forms of pronouns, and adverbs rather than adjectives of modified verbs.

"Just imitation!!" we have been habitual to say. True but imitation which would be impossible without concepts of the habit to be imitated. The children are not repeating, parrot-like, whole sentences which they have heard, but making countless sentences of new words put together in the traditional constructions and inflected according to the traditional patterns. The syntax and inflections of English may be so familiar to a six-year-old that his speech is piratically errorless and quite as varied in sentence structure as his ideas require. That is to say, six-year-old *may* have the command of grammar which it is the object of so much of our instructions to give. How have the fortunate children acquired painlessly and unconsciously this equipment of working grammatical concepts which we strive so earnestly and so vainly to teach in school? By hearing thousands of examples of each construction with the meaning in the focus of their care and the form generally receiving only incidental

notice; and also by trying to imitate these construction in order to convey their own meanings to others. How thorough or permanent such learning is we teachers should realize through the difficulty of correcting any mistakes in it.

Fortunately most children, even those somewhat underprivileged, have most of their concepts right, with mistaken notions of such matters as the case of pronouns after *and* and the inflections of a few irregular verbs, possibly without a clear conception of the adverb-adjective distinction. They could not even use our normal word order if they did not have implicit knowledge of the constructions we call *subject*, *predicate*, *object*, *modifier*—even *phrase* and *clause*. A grammarless person could neither read with understanding nor speak intelligibly. Even his thinking would be rudimentary. What remains, then, as the objective of school training in grammar? Surely, to correct erroneous grammatical concepts arising from the faulty speech of several children's parents and friends, and to extend or develop concepts of some constructions rarely or never used by the aforesaid parents and friends. We must keep firmly in mind that it is these *grammatical ideas* and their habitual employment at which we are aiming. Now, it would seem reasonable to employ in school the method which proves so effective outside. But the outside learning goes on whether we will or not, and repeatedly continues to reinforce the misconcepts we wish to correct.

Of course we throw into the balance all the hearing and reading of correct construction such as "That is something for you and me to do" which the activities of the school can use; but if the youngster hears elsewhere ten hours day "That is something for you and I to do", his concept of the construction is proper sure to be wrong. To weight the scales in favour of our pattern we must contrive to focus

attention upon it and to make it seem more desirable. Let us begin our teaching of a point in grammar by discovering first to ourselves and then to our pupils in expressional problem which they have and which the proper use of this construction will solve. This problem may be one of correctness, such as using *is* or *are*, *do* or *does* in relative clauses; or one of effectiveness, such as utilising a variety of word orders and placing at the strating of a sentence an echo of the preceding sentence or some other transitional expression. These expressional problems of the children all recur so frequently that the teacher may easily attack them in a logical order. Almost any day in the usual class the teacher may find need for almost any construction, so that the teaching of grammar may be both systematic and incidental at the same time.

The manner in which the students' attention is called to the expressional problem may be as varied as the forms of marriage proposals, depending upon circumstances and personalities. Let us assume the simplest and baldest procedure merely saying that a sentence such as "This is something for you and I to work out". seems to have a mistake in it. If the class can readily agree that *me* should replace *I* in this sentence, we pass at once to imitation of the construction. Unless the students already have a clear concept of the "object of a preposition" some of the imitation will be wrong, and comparison of "John and *I* will do it" with "This is for you and *I*" will bring out this concept of object of a preposition. If the class cannot readily agree upon *I* or *me*, a search for similar constructions which are known to be correct is in order. Composition texts, readers, and any well written books (excluding the speeches of illiterate characters in fiction), as well as sentences used by or approved by educated adults of the pupils acquaintance, are proper sources. Sorting



and comparison of these bring out the notion of "object of a preposition"—and shortly the teacher uses the terms *preposition* and *object* with out confusion to the children.

Let us assume a more subtle procedure with a problems of effectiveness. The students write too many simple sentence with the invariable order of subject, predicate, object, adverbial modifiers. The teacher presents two short paragraphs of identical content but one in choppy simple sentences and the other in complex sentences which show relations and subordination of ideas. Any upper elementary or high school class easily chooses the better, complex-sentence version. Then they take a new choppy paragraph and improve it. If unable to do this they take pairs of sentences and combine them, and then frame other sentences in imitation of these. When they have become quite conscious of these combining words the teacher begins to call these words conjunctions and possible calls the formerly separate statements when combined in a sentence clauses. The students, needing to refer to these constructions in discussing their students, begin to apply *conjunction* and *clause* just as they have learned to apply appropriately *mother*, *chair*, *school*, *play* and *lie* (falsehood). Their concepts of conjunction and clause will not be as complete or as definite as the teacher's, but the concepts will be genuine and thoroughly at home in the students' mind—a part of their working equipment. With use such concept will become both broader and more definite, just as do *mother*, *lie*, etc.

Note that the terminology of grammar is applied—AFTER concepts to which to apply it have been created or brought to conscious attention. It will be a real convenience on future occasions to be able to recall these constructions by speaking of *preposition* and *object* instead of saying "a short word like *for*, *from* to" and "the main word after one of those short words".



The terminology of grammar is useful when it is added concepts the pupils already have and which they have become conscious of. It is baffling and discouraging if given before the concept is acquired and recognized.

And concepts—especially difficult, abstract ones such as the relationships that constitute the science of grammar—are required more readily and clearly through a number of attentively considered examples than through definition. William Heard Kilpatrick, whose conceptual power and sense of language are distinguished, tell us that his teacher's definition of preposition meant absolutely nothing to him, and that when she gave some examples the only common characteristic he could discern was brevity. Accordingly when called to give further examples he offered all the short words he could think of, including *the* and *and*—which for some reason mysterious to him the teacher would not accept. Only years later did he find out what prepositions really are. Most youngsters do even worse than little Williee Kilpatrick, and instead of studying the examples to find their common characteristic, memorize the definition with its abstract words which are inevitably semantic blanks. In Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*, Dubedat, the villain, when called a "scoundrel", asks, "What is a scoundrel?" and receives the only possible reply, "You're a scoundrel"—an example, not definition. Only one who had the concepts of honour, of property rights, of truthfulness which he seems never to have sensed, could understand a definition or explanation of the epithet. The teacher who tries to tell a pupil what is sentence is by saying that is "a group of words which makes an *assertion*", asks a question, or gives a command", would much better depend upon illustrations and conscious, supervised imitation. To define "subject" as "the word about which the *predicate* makes an *assertion*" is obviously not to illuminate a mind which

has failed to perceive that *John and I went* rather than *Me and John went* is the usual form in books and among educated people. The grammatical concepts, as accurate concepts as feasible, are necessary. The terminology is used, if attached to concepts already formed. Definitions, confusing and harmful if given too soon, are useful only if worked out by the pupil himself—and then most of the value lies in the thinking done in working them out. Let us return to the classroom process. The first step was to bring up the expressional problem. The second step was to discover the construction which solves that problem of correctness or of effectiveness. In most cases this discovery of the construction includes imitation which begins ability to use the construction.

If there has not been sufficient repetition to give easy command of the construction, further repetition—call it practice or drill, if you wish—should follow. Anyone who has watched children knows that they do not mind practicing when they foresee and approve the performance to come. Please note that this practice does not attempt to set up a *habit* of speech or writing; it can develop nothing more than the ability to use this particular locution and feasibly the realization of its desirability.

Uttimattly the now familiar construction is used to solve the expressional problem raised at first, and the class goes on. Being only human, the youngsters may have to return to the same topic again later; some of them may even have to go through the developmental process again. When we choose only functional grammatical ideas to present we have time for essentval reviews. In the procedure I am presenting we never have to look for opportunities for the students to use the grammar they have learned. Nor do the students find difficult in deliberate speech or writing the application of the grammar they have learned, for they learned the grammatical ideas, not

someone else's abstract description of these ideas or concepts, and learn them in and through such use as they later need to make. There is a further benefit of the procedure which I can but mention here. When we force ourselves to find the expressional problem any grammatical construction or concept will solve before we present that construction or concept, all the items useless to our particular pupils are automatically excluded—deferred to the elective course in the junior or senior year—and the useful items are with equal inevitability included. No other scheme for separating functional from theoretical grammar is so easy and so satisfactory. This is not the place for a detailed listing of the expressional problems and the corresponding items of grammar. We all know that students' errors are mainly in the number of present-tense verbs; in confusion of the preterit with the past participle of irregular verbs, especially of *come*, *do*, *go*, *run*, and *see*; in wrong case forms of pronouns, especially after *and*; in the use of adverbial forms to change verbs and adverbs; and in writing incomplete and run-on sentences.

We all know that our students could speak and write better if they were able to subordinate the statements of subordinate ideas, to put parallel ideas in parallel form, to put the chief meaning of the predicate in the verb rather than in the auxiliary noun to use relative *whose* (not found in Fries in his samples of illiterate writing) and *whom*, to bring transition words to the starting of sentences, and so on. For a complete list examine in any good course of study the errors to be corrected and the graces of expression to be learned.

Precisely, (1) Make the students feel it to be their problem. (2) Find the expressional problem. (3) Lead the students to the solution. (4) Give further practice, if required. (5) Have the students apply the solution to their problem. (6) Be on the alert for recurrence of this problem.



## Coloured Folk Designation

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The decision of the *Times* was inspired, according to its own account by Major Robert Russa Moton, then principal of Tuskegee Institute, but he was by no means the originator of the movement, nor was the *Times* the first American newspaper to yield. The true pioneer appear to have been Lester Aglar Watson, a coloured journalist hailing from St. Louis, who, after a varied career on both Negro and white newspapers, was made minister to Liberia in 1935. 'In 1913', he says of himself in *Who's Who in America*, 'with cooperation of Associated press, started movement for capitalization of *N* in *Negro*'. He does not give the name of the first newspaper to be fetched, but by the time the *Times* succumbed there were already some important ones in his corral—among them, the New York *World*, *Herald Tribune* and *Telegram*, the Chicago *Herald-Examiner* (Hearst), the *Christian Science Monitor* of Boston, the Springfield (Mass.) *Republican*, and the Brooklyn *Eagle*.

Besides, he had made some converts in the South, even in the Deep South—for example, the Montgomery (Ala.) *Advertiser* (then edited by the late Grover Hall), the Durham (N.C.) *Sun*, and the Columbus (Ga.) *Ledger*. Yet more, he had persuaded a number of national magazines, including the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, the



*American Mercury*, and *Time*. Finally, he had rounded up several government agencies—for instance, the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Education and the whole Department of Commerce. But the surrender of the *Times* was hailed as a crucial victory in the long war, and when it was followed three years later by that of the Style Manual of the Government Printing Office, which sets the style for the *Congressional Record* and is generally followed by other government publications there was a renewal of the rejoicing. The one dissentient was George S. Schuyler, columnist since 1924 for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, contributor to many white magazine, author of 'Black-No-More', father of the *Wunderkind*, Philippa Schuyler, and the best Negro journalist, and by long odds, ever heard of. On March 15, 1930, only a week after the *Times* had come into camp, he broke out in the *Courier* with the following: It really doesn't matter a thinker's damn whether *Negro* is spelled with a small or large N, so far as the negro's political, economic and cultural status is concerned.

The gabble, mostly senseless, to the contrary has vastly amused me; for, if anything, it is worse to spell *Nego* with a large N than with a small one, and if I had my way I would discontinue it.... The truth is that the American Negro is an amalgam of Caucasian, Amerindian and African, there being but 20 per cent. 'pure', and those are the only ones entitled to the term *Negro* when used as a descriptive adjective. Geographically, we are neither Ethiopians or Africans, but Americans. Culturally, we are Anglo-Saxons. Used as a noun, the term is therefore a designation of a definite social caste, an under-dog, semi-serf class which believes it is dignifying its status by a capitalization of the term by which it is known as and recognized. This is the same thing as arguing that an imbecile is somewhat ennobled by spelling the word with a

capital or that a convict has his status improved by spelling the word with a capital C. Lifting *Negro* from the lower case to the upper typographically does not in the least elevate him socially.

As a matter of fact, it fits right in with the programme of racial segregation. As *negroes* we are about 3,000,000 strong, as *Negroes* we are 12,000,000 strong; as *negroes* we are a definite physical type, as *Negroes* we are a definite social class. It is important that Southern newspapers and magazines were more ready and willing to make the change in *Negro* than the Northern publications. The former are ever eager to make the Negro satisfied with his place; the latter based their objections on etymological and grammatical grounds...

The possession of physical characteristics or ancestry different from other people by any citizen should not be constantly emphasized and brought to the attention of newspaper readers, especially in this country. The interests of interracial peace demand the abolition of such references and we ought to fight for that and lose no time trying to get white folks to 'dignify' a socio-chromatic caste system established and maintained by them for their own convenience and economic advantage. There is something ridiculous about a so-called *Negro* bellowing against color discrimination and segregation while wearing out his larynx whining for a glorification of his Jim Crow status in society through capitalization of the *N* in *Negro*.

Mr. Schuyler returned to the subject many times afterward. Thus on July 17, 1937:

Negro clearly belongs with *blonde*, *brunette*, *ruddy*, *mulatoo*, *octoroon* and such descriptive terms, and has no stronger claim on capitalization. ... Capitalized, it tends to bolster the *status quo*, and thus is at best conservative and at worst reactionary, for it discourages differentiation and

strengthens the superstition that 'all coons are alike'.

And again on March 20, 1943:

*Negro* is either an adjective meaning black or it is a caste name like *Sudra*. When we eagerly accept it as a group designation, regardless of our skin tint, we are accepting all the racial nonsense of Hitler, Bilbo, and the myriads who believe as they do — at least in the day time.

But Mr. Schuyler's iconoclastic position got no support from the general run of American coloured folk, nor from their accepted fuglemen and haruspices. Even so generally non-conforming a spokesman of the race as the late Dr. Kelly Miller was moved, in 1937, to argue for *Negro* in *Opportunity*, the organ of the National Urban League.

In the first days of slavery, Dr. Miller said, the slaves were called simply *blacks*, and even after interbreeding lightened their colour the term continued in use 'in a generic sense'. Then came *African*, which 'was accepted by the race in the early years, after it first came to self-consciousness', and still survives in the titles of some of its religious organizations, e.g., the *African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*. (This according to the *Dictionary of American English*, was during the first half of the Eighteenth Century). A bit later *darky* or *darkey* began to be used, and 'at first it carried no invidious implication'. (The *DAE*'s first example is dated 1775.) Then came *Africo-American* (1835 or thereabout), but it was too clumsy to be adopted. After the Civil War *freedman* was in wide use, but it began to die out before the end of the 70's. In 1880 *Afro-American* was invented by T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *New York Age*, and it still survives, but only in rather formal usage. 'Mr. Fortune', said Dr. Miller, 'repudiated the word *Negro* because of the historical degradation and humiliation attached to it', At some undetermined time after 1900 Sir



Harry Johnston, the English African explorer and colonial administrator, shortened *Afro-American* to *Aframerican*, but the latter has had but little vogue. After rehearsing, in his article, the history of all these appellations, Dr. Miller turned to *Negro* and *colored*, and proceeded to discuss their respective claims to general adoption. The latter, he concluded, could not qualify, for it was properly applicable to any person not white, including Chinese, Japanese, Indians and Mexicans, and had been so applied in various State laws, and even, at least by inference, in Federal population statistics. Thus his reasoning.

Dr. Miller admitted that 'such terms as *colored lady*, *coloured gentleman* and *coloured society*' sounded 'more polite than the corresponding *Negro* equivalents', but argued that the preference for them probably grew out of 'that to which the ear is accustomed'. He went on:

Many of the off-coloured group object to the term *Negro* because it serves as a reminder of the humiliation and degradation through which the race has passed. The fact that *Negro* is now used to describe the group does not indicate any lesser degree of appreciation or esteem.

...Any race or group, in the long run, will derive its reputation from its character and worth, and not from the appellation by which it is known. . . . Sensitiveness about a name is always a sign of the inferiority complex.

Dr. Miller, going further than most other advocates of *Negro*, was also willing to accept *Negress*, which is intolerably offensive to most high-toned coloured folk: Here the iconoclastic Schuyler agreed with him, saying :

If we accept the term *Negro* there is no sound reason for spurning *Negress*, and yet its use is discouraged and condemned without, of course, any sensible argument being advanced for this position. I understand Jews are similarly



unreasonable about the term *Jewess*. But inspite of this agreement of two high Negro authorities, the *Atlantic Monthly* got into hot water when in October, 1935, it utilised *Negress* in an editorial reference to a coloured contributor, Miss Juanita Harrison, author of a serial entitled 'My Great, Wide, Beautiful World'. Besides, it added to its offense by speaking of the lady by her given name alone, without the *Miss*. Protests came in promptly, and one of them, from Isadore Cecilia Williams, of Washington, was printed in the issue for December, along with an editorial explanation. I take the following from Miss (or Mrs.?) Williams's letter:

*Negress* ... is obnoxious to Negroes chiefly because of the sordid, loose, and often degrading connotations it has been forced to carry. From the view point of etymology I believe I am right in saying that the use of *ess* as a suffix to designate the women of any race is practically obsolete. Out of courtesy to a race and a sex I suggest that you hereafter discard the offensive term *Negress*.

It was small, to say the least, to refer to Miss Harrison as *Juanita* in the editorial preface to her letters. Perhaps it is mere class distinction, but class distinction should be under the dignity of your pages. A witness in a recent kidnapping case, though only a nursemaid, was referred to as *Miss Betty Gow*.

Certainly Miss Harrison, whose honesty you commend and whose native intelligence merited a place in your pages, deserves at least common courtesy at your hands. To this the editor of the *Atlantic* replied lamely that he 'really did not know that the word *Negress* carried a derogatory connotation'. I suppose, he went on, 'that the feeling must come from the analogy of the suffix *-ess* being used throughout the animal kingdom'. In further confession and avoidance he cited the parallel terms, *Jewess* and *Quakeress*, easily overlooking the

fact (maybe also unknown to him) that the former is vastly disliked by Jews. As to the use of her simple given-name in referring to Miss Harrison he said:

In the correspondence regarding her which came from a former employer she was continually referred to as *Juanita*, and it was natural to transfer this designation to the *Atlantic*. We certainly meant no disrespect, for as you surmise, we thought her an honest, interesting and able character. Other Negro publicists have proposed various substitutes for any designation pointing directly to colour, among them *race* and *group*.

According to Dr. Miller, *racemen* was suggested in 1936 or thereabout by Robert L. Abbot, editor of the *Chicago Defender*. Dr. Miller himself rejected it as equally applicable to a white man or an Indian and predicted that it would 'fall under the weight of its own ineptness'. It has, however, survived more or less, and *group* is really flourishing. Many of the Negro newspapers use *our group*, *group man*, *group leader*, etc. Some of them also use such terms as *brownskinned* and *sepia* to get away from the fortnight but usually inaccurate *black*, and in 1944 there was a *Sepia* Miss America contest operated by a committee in Boston. At present the surviving objection to Negro, now capitalized by nearly all American publications, takes two forms. First, there is a campaign against using it whenever a person of colour comes into the news, on the ground that calling attention to his race is gratuitous, and generally damaging to the other members of it. Second, there is resentment of the unhappy fact that the word is frequently mispronounced, and tends to slide into the hated *nigger*. In the South it is commonly heard as *nigrah*, and not only from white lips. Indeed, *nigrah* is also used by Northern Negroes, comprising some of the most eminent, as witness the following protest from a reader of the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

A great many professional Negro orators, prominent speakers, leaders and so on are speaking on the radio all over the country—on forums, 'March of Time' programmes, etc. Nearly all make the one big clear error of pronouncing *Negro* as if it were spelled *nigro* or *nigrah* . . . It is all the more noticeable when white people are on the same programme. They pronounce *Negro* correctly, with the emphasis on *ne* and not *nig*.

Worse, even the abhorred *nigger* is in wide use among the coloured people themselves, particularly on the lower levels. Said Luscious Harper, managing editor of the *Chicago Defender*, in 1939:

It is a common expression among the ordinary Negroes and is used frequently in conversation between them. It carries no odium or sting when used by themselves, but they object keenly to whites using it because it conveys the spirit of hate, discrimination and prejudice.

*Nigger* is so bitterly resented by the more elegant members of the race that they object to it even in quotations, and not a few of their papers spell it *n—r* when necessity forces them to use it. On March 4, 1936, Garnet C. Wilkinson first assistant superintendent of schools of Washington, in charge of the Negro public schools of the District of Columbia, actually recommended to Superintendent F. W. Ballou that *Opportunity*, for years a recognized leader among Negro magazines, be barred from the schools of the District on the ground that it used 'the opprobrious term *N—* in its publications on Negro life'. When news of this recommendation reached Elmer A. Carter, the editor, he naturally protested, and under date of March 11 received the following from Dr. Wilkinson:

It is contrary to a long established administrative policy, initiated and fostered by the school teachers and officers of



Divisions 10-13 of the public schools of the district, to recommend to the Board of Education the adoption of any textbook, basic or supplementary, magazine, or periodical known to make use of the term *N*— in its publication.

Textbooks published by white authors and making use of such material have been refused for adoption in our public schools. Textbooks have been withdrawn from the approved list for the same reason. Obviously, a textbook, magazine, or periodical published by a *Negro* should be subject to the same administrative policy. There can be no double standard of evaluating such school materials—one standard for white authors, another standard for Negro authors.

You are now advised that the office would be willing to recommend the placing of *Opportunity* on the approved list of magazines and periodicals for the public schools of the District if you, as editor, will give us the assurance that *Opportunity* will discontinue the policy of using any opprobrious term or terms in referring to the Negro.

Mr. Carter replied to this curious communication under date of March 17, as follows:

Even a casual examination of the magazine will reveal that your recommendation has been based on a total misconception of the use of the term *nigger* when it appears in *Opportunity*. That use is limited to quotations from other writers or is the reproduction in poem or story of the speech and conversation of characters who commonly use this term, and in both cases the word or the line in which it occurs is always set off by quotation marks, italics, or other literary and printing insignia.

It should not be necessary for me to direct your attention to the fact that there is a vast and obvious difference in the use of a word or phrase in quotation and its use as a definitive term in the editorial contents of a publication, nor to affirm



that *Opportunity* never employs an epithet of opprobrium in its columns except under the limitations mentioned above.

If impartially applied, the ruling of the Board of Education will achieve astonishing if not fantastic results. For by the same standards the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, *Harper's*, *Time*, the *Literary Digest*, the *Forum*, in fact, almost every magazine which on occasion publishes stories or articles involving the Negro, must likewise be removed from the list of magazines approved for the children in the Negro schools of Washington. By the same token the most authoritative books on suitable reading matter for Negro children in the District of Columbia. For this incredible decision would refuse approval to 'The Souls of Black Folk' and 'Black Reconstruction', by DuBois; 'The Black Worker', by Harris; 'Shadow of the Plantation', by Johnston; the autobiography of Frederick Douglass; 'The Life and Works of Booker T. Washington', the novels of Walter White, Chestnutt and Dumbar, and the poetry of Countee Cullen, Steling Brown Lanston Hughes, to mention only a few.

Nothing came of this effort to purge *Opportunity of nigger*. I am told by Lester B. Granger, executive secretary of the National Urban League, that it is still used whenever required by 'a faithful description of real life situations', through 'where it adds nothing to the contact it is sometimes eliminated'. The same failure marked an effort to work up a boycott against Noxzema, a lotion popular among Negroes as among whites, because the credit manager of the manufacturing company had used to phrase *nigger in the woodpile* in a dunning circular to slow-paying druggists. This boycott was launched by an organization calling itself the National Commission on Negro Work, affiliated with the International Workers Order, and for a while a committee collected signatures to a paper demanding that the company

'apologize publicly', discharge the offending credit manager, and 'open job opportunities for Negroes in your plant'. Every singer was invited to make a contribution to 'a collection to defray costs of promotion only' and so deliver 'a sock at Hitlerism', but the company refused to be intimidated, and nothing came of the boycott. Nor did any greater success attend an attack by the same National Commission on the A. & P. stores for selling a *Niggerhead* stove-polish. But a year before this the New York *Amsterdam News* apparently had better luck with a crusade against the American Tobacco Company for offering a *Niggerhead* smoking-tobacco, for on March 20, 1943 the *Nation* announced that the brand would be withdrawn. *Nigger in the woodpile* is traced by the *DAE* to 1861, and is defined by it as 'a hidden or inconspicuous but very important fact, factor, or "catch" in an account, proposal, etc.'

Of the six examples that it gives, two are from the *Congressional Record*. *Niggerhead*, in the more refined form of *negrohead*, is traced to 1833, and defined as 'a low grade of strong, dark coloured tobacco'. It was used by Huckleberry Finn in contradistinction to store-tobacco. *Niggerhead*, in the sense of a piece of extraordinary hard rock, goes back to 1847, and has been utilised in a report of the Smithsonian; it also appears in 'Chicago Poems' by Carl Sandburg, 1916. Negro is not, of course, an Americanism. It is simply the Spanish and Portuguese word for 'black', and was borrowed by the English during the Sixteenth Century. By 1587 a Northern English form, *neger*, had appeared, and it was from this that both the Irish *naygur* and the English-American *nigger* were derived. The *New English Dictionary's* first instance of *nigger* comes from a poem by Robert Burns, published in 1786, in the United States, in the spelling of *niger*, the *Dictionary of American English* traces it to Samuel Sweall's diary, 1700.

But after that the *DAE* offers no instance until the Nineteenth Century. *Nigger-boy* is traced to 1825, *nigger-went* to 1837, *nigger-regiment* to 1863, *nigger-talk* to 1866 (*nigger* alone, meaning the manner of speech of Negroes, goes back to 1825), *niggerish* to 1825, *nigger-killer* to 1856, *nigger-luck* (meaning good luck) to 1851, and *nigger-heaven* (the top gallery in a theatre) to 1878. *Nigger-stealer*, once a term of opprobrium comparable to the *isolationist* of today, is not listed, and neither are *nigger-lover*, *nigger-job*, *nigger-mammy* and *nigger-gal*. There are several other derivatives. I have mentioned *nigger-head* in the sense of a lump of hard rock, and in that of coarse chewing and smoking tobacco. It is also used to designate the common black-eyed Susan, a variety of greenbrier, and one of cactus. After the Civil War it was utilised for a person in favour of full political equality for Negroes. There are a *nigger-duck*, a *nigger-goose*, a *nigger-wee*, and many kinds of *nigger-duck*. To *nigger off* means to divide a log into convenient lengths by burning through it, to *nigger out* means to exhaust the soil by working it without fertilizer, and to *nigger it* means to live meagerly. A *nigger* is a device used in sawmills to turn a heavy log, and also a defect in an electrical conductor, causing a short circuit. *Neggertoe* is a dialect name, in rural New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania, for a Brazil nut, and was once used to designate a variety of potato. To *work like a nigger* is traced by the *DAE* to 1836, and to *let off alitter nigger* to 1828. The use of *niggerhead* to signify a hard stone was no doubt suggested by the old American belief that the skull of the Negro is extraordinarily thick, and hence able to stand hard blows without cracking. That superstition is accompanied by one to the effect that the shins of the coloured folk are extremely tender. The notion that they have an inordinate fondness for watermelon belongs to the same category. This last is so



far resented by high-toned Negroes that they commonly avoid *Citrullus vulgaris* in their diet as diligently as the more elegant sort of German-Americans used to avoid Limburger cheese. Before 1890, according to Dr. Miller, the Census Bureau 'sought to sub-divide the Negro group into *blacks*, *mulattoes*, *quadroons* and *octoroons*', but found it 'not possible to make such sharp discriminations, since these divisions ran imperceptibly into one another'. It was upon the advice of Booker T. Washington that it began calling all coloured persons of African blood *Negroes*. *Mulatto*, *quadroon* and *octoroon* have now almost disappeared from American speech. Of them, only *octoroon* appears to be an Americanism. *Mulatto*, which comes from the Spanish and Portuguese *mulato*, signifying a young mule, and hence a halfbreed, is traced by the *NED* in English use to 1595. Originally, the word meant the immediate offspring of a Negro and a white person, but by the beginning of the Eighteenth Century it was being applied to anyone of mixed white and Negro blood. In the early chronicles and travel-books it was spelled in a dozen different ways, some of them quite fantastic, e.g., *malatta*, *melatto*, *muletto* and *mulatoes*. *Quadroon* is a loan from the *quoteron* of the Louisianians French, who borrowed it in turn from the Spanish *curateron*, The *NED*'s first example of *quarteron* is dated 1707; Thomas Jefferson used it in that form in 1793. In the form of *quotroon* it goes back to 1748 in English usage and to 1808 in American and in the form of *quodroon* to 1796 and 1832 respectively. *Octoroon* is apparently more recent. There is no recorded trace of its before 1861, when Dion Boucicault used it in the title of a play. *Griffe*, another loan from the French of Louisian, is now obsolete. It signified, according to Miss Grace E. King, quoted by the *DAE*, a mixed breed one degree lighter than an *octoroon*, the series being *mulatto*, *quadroon*, *octoroon*, *griffe*.



The irreverent Schuyler, who does not hesitate to refer to the members of his race, in his column in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, as *Senegambians*, *tarbrushed folk* and so on, frequently discusses the opprobrious names that have been applied to them, e.g., *darkey*, *coon*, *shine*, *smoke*, *woolly-head*, *dinge* and *boogie*. In 1936, when the *Baltimore Afro-American* started as holy war against 'My Old Kentucky Home' because *darkey* occurs in it, and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People denounced the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin for using it in a radio speech, he said:

Will some one who has the gift the logic and intelligence tell me what is the difference between *darkey* and *Negro*? ... There can be no more real objection to *darkey* than there can be to *blondie*. It is a far more acceptable term than *wop* or *kike*. As my friend J.A. Rogers once profoundly remarked, the difference between *Negro* and *sugger* is the difference between *sir* and *sab*. Granted that the over-whelming majority of Negroes are opposed to the use of these terms, I can see no point in constantly making a wailing protest against their use.

*Coon*, though it is now one of the most familiar designations for a Negro, apparently did not come into general use in that sense until the 80's; Thornton's first example is dated 1891 and the *DAE*'s 1887. For many years before that time the term had been used in the sense of a loutish white man, and in Henry Clay's day it had designated a member of the Whig party. It came originally, of course, from the name of the animal, *Procyon lotor*, which seems to have been borrowed from the Algonquian early in the Seventeenth Century, and was shortened from *racoona* to *coon* before 1750. 'How the Negro Got the Name of Coon' is the title of one of the stories in a collection of Maryland folk-lore published by Mrs. Walter R. Bullock, Jr., in 1898, but all it

shows is that the Negro who is the chief figure called himself a coon, and that the name was afterward applied to others. Why he did so is not explained, nor when. The popularity of the term seems to have got a lift from the vast success of Ernest Hogan's song, 'All Coons Look Alike to Me', in 1896. Hogan, himself a coloured man, used it without opprobrious intent, and was amazed and crushed by the resentment it aroused among his people. Says Edward B. Marks in *They All Sang*:

The refrain became a fighting phrase all over New York. Whistled by a white man, it was construed as a personal insult. Rosamond Johnson relates that he once saw two men thrown off a ferry-boat in a row over the tune. Hogan became an object of censure among all the Civil Service intelligensia, and died haunted by the awful crime he had unwittingly committed against his race.

'All Coons Look Alike to Me' was followed in 1899 by 'Every Race has a Flag But the Coon,' by Heelan and Helf, two white men, and in 1900 by 'Coon, Coon, Coon,' by two others, Jefferson and Friedman, and from that time forward coon was firmly established in the American vocabulary. The history of the other more or less opprobrious synonyms for Negro is mainly obscure. The *DAE* does not list boogie and its congeners, but reports that booger is an Americanism, traced to 1866, for a bogey. In 1891 a writer in *Harper's Magazine*, quoted by the *DAE*, defined boogah-hole as 'the hiding place of cats and of children fleeing from justice' and of boogars or boogahs, 'whatever these mysterious beings may be'. It is possible that the suggestion of darkness developed boogie from booger or boogah. The later form, however, hints at a Southern variant of bogey or bogey, which has been traced in England, by the *NED*, in the sense of the devil, to 1836, in the sense a goblin to 1857, and in that of

a bugber to 1865. In Balti more, in my childhood, *boogie-man* was one of the names of the devil. *Buffalo* as a designation for a Negro is not listed by the DAE, but it provides the word as used to designate a North Carolina Unionist during the Civil War; it has also been applied to the people of seaboard North Carolina in general. From the early Eighteenth Century down to 1880 or tehreabout *Cuffy* was a generic name for a Negro, comparable to *Pat* for an Irishman. George Philip Krapp says in *The English Langauage in America* that 'it is said to be derived from Dutch *Koffi*, in Guiana a common name for Negroes and by custom applied to anyone born on Friday'.

The DAE calls it 'of African origin' and traces it to 1713. It had a rival in *Sambo*, which clarly arose, not in the United States, but in England. The DAE traces it to 1748 there and to 1866 here. In any boyhood *Cuffy* had disappeared and *Sambo* was being supplanted by *Rastus*.

During the same era *Liza* or *Lize* was the common name for a coloured girl. The DAE omits *dinge* and lists *dinkey* only in the adjectival sense of small, trifling. *Dinkey*, in the Baltimore of my nonage, meant a coloured child. Webster's *New International*, 1934, lists *dinge*, but omits *dinkey* in the sense here considered. *Kink* displays clear allusion to the Negro's hair, the DAE says that *kinky*, as applied to it, is an Americanism, and traces it to 1844.

When, in 1936, Cab Calloway, the Negro musician, used *kinky-head* in a broadcast, he was violently belaboured by the radio critic of one of the Negro weeklies. *Wooly-head* is first found by the DAE in Cooper's *The Prairie* in 1827; it was also used by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Dred: a Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* in 1856. During the Civil War era the term was applied, like *buffalo*, to Unionists. *Moke* is traced by the DAE to 1856, but the word was used in England



before this in the sense of a donkey. An amateur lexicographer calling himself Socrates Hyacinth, writing in 1869, sought to derive it 'from Icelandic *mockvi*, darkness', and called it 'a word chiefly in use among the Regulars stationed in Texas and in the Territories.' He further said that it also had 'Cymric affinities, and was probably brought into currency by Welsh recruits who have occasionally drifted into the Army from New York City'. This suggestion of possible Welsh origin was supported by an anonymous writer in the London *Daily Mirror* on November 28, 1938, who said that the etymology 'which receives the greatest expert support derives *moke* from the Welsh gipsy *moxio*, or *moxia* a donkey', 'Mexio', he continued, 'existed some fifty years before the first recorded instance, in 1848, of *moke*. Moreover, about 1839 somebody of the name of Brandon records *moak* as a cant word of gipsy origin, and, at that time, mainly gipsy use'. The *NED* calls *moke* 'of unknown origin', and Webster's *New International* marks it 'origin uncertain'. Ernest Weekley, in his *Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, suggests that it is perhaps from some name (*Moggy*?) applied to the ass', and says that *Mocke*, *Mok*, *Mog* and *Mug* 'all occur as personal names in the Thirteenth Century and survive in the surnames *Mokes* and *Moxon*.' *Moke* was thrown into competition with *coon* in 1899 by the success of 'Smokey Mokes', a popular song by Holzmann and Lind, but is now heard only seldom. *Pickanniny*, in the sense of a Negro child, is not an Americanism. It was in use in England so long ago as 1657, whereas the *DAE*'s first American example is dated 1800. The English prefer the spelling *piccaninny*; the word, in the past, was variously spelled *piccanini*, *pickoninnie*, *pick'ny*, *piccanin* and *picannin*. It appears to be derived from the Cuban Spanish *piquinini*, meaning a small child, and it was taken into English in the British West Indies. It is used



in South Africa briefly as we use it, but is commonly spelled *piccanin*. In Australia it designates a child of the aborigines, and has there produced a derivative, *picaninny-daylight*, signifying dawn. In the Baltimore of my youth *pickaninny* was not used invidiously, but rather affectionately. So, indeed, was *tar-pot*, also denoting a Negro child. The DAE does not list such vulgar synonyms for Negro as *ape*, *eightball*, *jazzbo*, *jigabo* (with the variants, *jibagoo*, *zigabo*, *jig*, *zigaboo*, *zig*), *jit*, *seal*, *skunk*, *shine*, *smoke*, *snowball*, *squasho spade*, and *Zulu*, *crow* is traced to 1823, when it was utilised by Cooper in *The Pioneers*, the first of the Leatherstocking tales. Whether it suggested *Jim Crow* or was itself suggested by *Jim Crow* I do not know. The DAE's first example of *Jim Crow* is dated 1838, but that example includes the statement that "Zip Coon" and "Jim Crow" are hymns of great antiquity.' The DAE says, however, that Thomas D. Rice's song and dance, 'Jim Crow', was written in 1832. The verb phrase, to *jump Jim Crow*, appeared a year later. By 1838 *Jim Crow* had become an adjective and it was so used by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852; of late it has also become a verb. The DAE's first example of *Jim Crow* car is dated 1861; of *Jim Crow* school, 1903; of *Jim Crow* bill 1904; of *Jim Crow* law, 1904, and of *Jim Crow* regulations, 1910. On April 10, 1943, the *Nation* used *Jap Crow* in the title of an article on the internment of the Japanese of the Pacific Coast, but this Winchellism did not catch on. *Eightball*, without doubt, is derived from the game of poole, which is played with fifteen numbered and vari-coloured balls, No. 8 being black. The DAE lists *blueskin* as an early synonym for Negro. It occurs in Cooper's *The Spy*, 1821, but had become obsolete before the Civil War. In Baltimore, in the 80's of the last century, the German-speaking householders, when they had occasion to speak of Negro

servants in their presence, called them *die blaue*. In the 70's *die schwarze* had been used, but it was believed that the Negroes had fathomed it. In the Bronx, so I am informed by a correspondent, the Jewish house-keepers use *die gelbe*, with *ein gelber* in the singular. Without doubt *gelbe* has failed of its purpose as miserably as *blau*, for the coloured folk always penetrate the stratagems of the Caucasian, and chuckle over them in a sad but amiable manner.

## Another Word From One Word

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World War II was a war of words as well as machines. Pamphlets were generally dropped before bombs. So that power might be theirs, long before blood was shed, totalitarian states were using words as weapons, were striking with less material missiles than sticks and stones.

In the beginning of many discussions of diction, we are reminded that in the beginning was the word. Just what it will come to has not yet been told; not only of words do we hear it lamented but of making many books, there is no end. In between is the growth of language, the history of mankind.

Methods of propaganda analysis were contrariwise propagated, seeking to uncover in words more sinister functions than to convey clear, cold sense. The relation with words, which seeped into popular interest in "crossword" puzzles and questions for "quiz" programmes, reawakened the science of semantics, which deals with the meanings words may bear. One thriving offshoot of this study, "general semantics", finds in the misunderstanding and misuse of words the cause of most of the evils of our time, from ulcers and broken homes to anti-Semitism and the cataclysm that has threatened to engulf the world.

Without venturing upon the troubled seas of such speculation, we may more moderately observe that within



words themselves much hidden wisdom lies. A word is a storehouse of human history.

Knowledge of the shifts in sense a word has undergone opens a vista of spreading civilization.

Consideration of the word *pluck*, for example, shows that—despite Marx and Frued, despite robot-makers and tamperers with hormones—human nature changes, if at all, but slowly. Folk physiology associated emotions with bodily organs: love with the heart; courage with the viscera (“intestinal fortitude”). And about a century ago *pluck* — the *pluck* was the part of the fowl a farmer could reach in and pluck forth — came to be utilised as a slang term for courage. The term won popularity; the new sense supplanted the old. And now, when a speaker wants anew a vivid term, in defiance of the doctors he plunges right back into the viscera and exclaims “That guy’s got guts!” [Folk physiology doubtless bears a grain of fact, for the scores of popular songs that sentimentally link heart (“Sweetheart”) and fond affection cannot wipe away the truth, as many a soldier with avouch, of the biblical remark ‘His bowels were loosed with fear’.] Other tendencies of human nature are manifest in such folk shiftings. *Humor* originally meant moisture (as still in *humidity*) — not since on laughs until one cries! Four bodily *humors*, fluids, were supposed to determine a man’s temperament; hence our adjectives *splenetic*, *bilious*, *sanguine*, *choleric*.

A melancholy person was one with an abundance of black bile. But men are careless: not that a thousand-legger words that signify an entire scale or range of meaning tend to slide toward one end of that scale. And *humor*, which first meant fluid, then fluid as determining disposition, then disposition, moved genially to its present *sense of humor*. A slide in the opposite direction was taken by *temper*, which



first meant nature; but now we seek to avoid a man that has a temper.

That the cynic slide is the more usual we may judge from the history of *prevent*. This originally meant to come before; users of the Book of Common Prayer used to beseech the Lord to "*prevent* me in all my doings". Come before me and prepare the way. That is the Lord's way; but in the greedier press of man's affairs, he that comes before is likely to take all that's to be had, thus to *prevent* other profiting. The word lapsed with human practice. While man goes down, however, he likes to dress himself up.

The word *melancholy* reminds us of the scholastic adornment of German names. Thus the scholar *Schwartzert* translated himself into the Greek *Melanchthon* (the second element of this name appears in the English adjective *autochthonous*); *Gerhard* took both Latin and Greek to become *Desiderius Erasmus*; the *Fischer* family is represented today by a stage director and drama-teacher named *Piscator*.

This process is by no means limited to names. It may result from the attempt of the *nouveau-rich* to appear *comme il faut* and *quite au courant*; thus, in the Renaissance, good English *rimes* were furbished forth as though the Greeks had spelled them: *rhymes*. In the same way, the *controller* that has taken his place by a long course through Norman French was brought back to his Latin, made *comptroller* of the court's moneys. *Advantage* and *advertise* had the *d* tucked in; and early English *avoutrie* was relatinized to modern *adultery* (from Latin *ad alter*, to another). Today, the estimable *physician* has his repute snatched at by the *mortician* and the *beautician*; or the *beauty-parlor* (itself a "high toned" word) is further adorned as the *cosmetarium*. The dressing up may, however, spring from a desire to avoid direct mention of an unpleasant fact. Such euphemism is deep-rooted in animistic

fears, but persists beyond conscious superstition. The word *cemetery* first meant a sleeping-peace; we speak of the deceased as having 'gone to his last rest'.

Shifting of word-meaning often leaves strange residue. By travelling into English through various lands, one Latin word may reach us in several forms, Thus *piazza* comes via Italy; *plaza*, from Spain; *place*, through France. *Regal* is direct from the Romans; the Normans have made it *royal*. Or a word may take divergent courses, so that different forms bear different meanings. Originally, for an instance, there was a close bond between to *gnaw* and to *now* (Latin *gnoscere*, to know; English *recognition*). This has been loosened; yet elsewhere the bond persists. A *ruminant* animal chews its cud; a thoughtful person *ruminate*s. Shakespeare unites the senses when he exclaims: "Chew upon this". But the most curious of these developments is that in which two contrasted words have coalesced in one form, so that a word means its own opposite. Thus a *fast* colour does not run, whereas a *fast* horse runs swiftly. To *cleave* means to cling tightly together, and to cut clean apart. The story of *unbending* shows how manners alter meaning. In the days of archers, when the taut cord was slipped from the bow, *unbending* implied a man gracious, with a touch of charm. But bowmen gave way before gunners, and a man *unbending* presented a different image, stiff as a ramrod.

Thus not only physiology and psychology, but more martial aspects of history, lurk within our words. When the Romans invaded Britain, they pitched many camps. The Latin *castra*, camp, lingers in English names, varying with the locality as *-cester*, *-caster*, *-chaster*. Thus *Westchester* was the west camp. The Saxon name for a county was *shire*; with an early native name, we have three epochs of English history recorded in *Worcestershire*, known in America chiefly as the

name of a sauce. In Scotte's *Ivanhoe*, the jester points out to the swineherd that while the animal is alive and must be tended, it is Saxon *bull*, *calf*, *pig*; but it is served at the lord's table as good Norman *beef*, *veal*, *pork*.

Sociology is in the onion of other words. There was probably a duty on figs in ancient Greece; a man that wished to curry favour with the authorities might whisper: "Go down to the shore beyond Calchos' at dusk tomorrow, and you'll find a boat-load...." He was a *fig-shower*, which is the meaning of *sycophant*. Thus today, the lad that brings a big bright delicious for teacher is an *apple-shiner*; his elder of a century ago was (and still may be) a *bootlicker*.

Economics plays its part, as may be seen through the word *silly*, which once (like German *selig*) meant blessed. To the Saxons, the Norman overlords were blessed, *silly*: they had nothing to do but enjoy themselves all day. Thus *silly* came to mean not busy, idle; Coleridge speaks of "the *silly* buckets on the deck", because there was no rainwater for them to hold. Something of the coming change may be glimpsed in his use; for with the eighteenth century came a growing sense of the dignity of labour, and with the industrial revolution came jobs aplenty; thus a person that was idle was likely to be a bit foolish; and *silly* acquired its present force. Through the same impules the word *busy* moved in a converse direction: meaning active, it was in Old English applied to the passions; then, as still surviving in *busybody*; then with a sense of value, as we use it now. A more neutral application remains in the school expression *busy work*, activity to keep the children out of mischief while the teacher tends to other concerns.

These processes, of course, are going on continuously, within all our words. What new wine will be poured from our old bottles, we can scarcely prophesy. Semantic shifts are



gradual, as the mores change. More obvious movements of the language, however, can be noted in certain fields; and certain methods of word formation can be observed in action.

Where science establishes new ranges of knowledge, industry new articles of use, politics new orders of organization, words must be found for their labels. Several of these have been drawn from the names of persons instrumental: *watt*, *volt*, *ohm* and its converse *mho*. *Silhouette* was a French treasurer so parsimonious that he would purchase only outline drawings. *Winchester* reminds us that the largest cannon of World War I was named after the manufacturer's wife, *Big Bertha* Krupp; but the still earlier gun also wears a pet name, derived from *Gunhilda*. The *zeppelin*, too, (from the Count von Zeppelin) displays that these words leap language limitations; as do the adjectives bequeathed us by the Roman gods — masquerading as planets for the astrologers' reading: *mercurial*, *jovial*, *saturnine*. From other tongues, indeed, many words at all times have come into our receptive language. *Garage* and *chauffeur* (which meant heater, stoker) we owe the French; but we have paid the debt with other words: *bifteak* (beefsteak), *bouledogue* (bulldog), *gratte-ciel* (a literal translation of skyscraper). Recently *tycoons* have been prominent in the gossip-columns of magazines; also from the Japanese the present War has staessed the *nisei* (second generation) in this land. Borrowing is perhaps less common, however, than re-adaptation of native words. With these, two opposite processes may be observed in constant play. Some words are built up, others are broken down.

The breakneck speed of reckless motorists is in a sense akin to the dash of the columnists into verbal novelties, seeking to sparkle, if not to startle, with innovations.

Our language, while it does not emulate the German sesquipedalian formation of polysyllables, is rich in picturesque



compounds: *joyride*, *hayseed*, *pantywaist*, *sobstuff*, *icebox*, *shut-eye*, *happy-go-lucky*, *jitterbug* — in a score of fields of living. The columnist, driven to desperate punning, as when a couple seeking a divorce at Reno, Nevada, is referred to as *Renovating*, is in this respect far feeblcr than the folk. Especially does the weakness of the would-be word coiner reveal itself with imitative sounds. Thus, to indicate the collapse of a project (like a punctured balloon), the columnist declares that it has *pffft*. Compare this to the folk expression of surprise, of the open mouth 'struck dumb': *ba*. The verbs, Latin *badare*, French *bayer*, to gape, picture the open mouth. But we may consider either the sound itself, whence we reach the *baa* of sheep and the *baying* of hounds; or we may look upon the gap, the opening, and arrive at the *bay* window and the Back Bay of Boston. From the same imitative source, via Old French *esbair*, *esbaiss-*, to make gape, comes English *bashful*. You see what happens when you open your mouth! While several words are thus formed by addition, others are created by processes of condensation. Your *dinner* (which indeed once was *breakfast*) is such a word. When the lord awoke (usually about noon), he *broke his fast* with a hearty meal.

The Late latin form *disjejunare*, from which French *diner*, to *dine*, was contracted, is formed of *dis-*, away and *jejunare*, to fast. (English *jeune* meant starving, hence thin, insubstantial.) The common man rises earlier; but *breaking one's fast* — breakfast — in French is still *dejeuner*. Our own times afford many examples of shortening; thus when a man shuts "Taxi!" he is really calling for a *taximetercabriolet*: a little wagon that leaps (jounces) like a goat, with a device for measuring its activity. More sudden methods of condensation are telescoping, and the forming of a word from the initial parts of an expression. Telescoping, the pressing of

words together (as *chortle*, from *chuckle* and *snort*) is the trick of the verbal experimenter, from *Jabberwocky* to Joyce (whom some called jabber-wacky!). Thus Joyce's *viterbation* seeks to pack together the name calling and the noise of a quarrel; as his *Joepeter* at once summons the god and tumbles him off Olympus.

The shortening of expressions into words — though commercially a conscious device, as with *Nabisco* and *Socony* — is a more natural, more frequently folk, proactice. *Nazi* is an abbreviation of *Nationals Zlalistiche*; *gestapo*, of *GEheime STAatsPOLizei*, secret state police; *flak*, of *FLiegerAbwehrKanone*, aircraft defence cannon (fire). In English directing, we have deducted *radar* from *RADio Directing And Range-finding*, and the army's freequent *snafu* from (in parlor parlance) *Situation Normal, All Fouled Up*. Other contractions range the alphabet from soup to nuts. In the course of language change, as new words come and old ones take new meanings, some fall by the way. A few of these leave notable gaps, and one might wish for the power — as of *anacampserote*: theat which brings back departed love!

To summon them from faded tomes into current usage. Thus the American politics of the days of James K. Polk drew, from the title of a campaign satire, a word for a trumped-up rumour, a *roorback*, again familiar in practice if not in name. Many old English words, obsolescent in his day, were given fresh virtue by Sir Walter Scott; our time has found no such refurbisher.

## Reading and General Semantics

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Somewhat colleges have been slower in accepting the same liability towards their students: until recently, in actual practice, the universal English. One was supposed to "take care of" any reading "deficiencies", inspite of the fact few faculty-members, least of all the English teachers, were satisfied with the results. At the present time, many colleges are experimenting with new methods of dealing with the "reading problem"; probably it is now the livest professional problem. It is encouraging indeed to note this stir of professional interest, for it is a response to a social problem of the very first importance. A primitive tribe can take its language (and the attitudes enshrined in it) "for granted" in its comparatively stable environment; but a modern democracy, whose citizens must adjust to (and help direct) social change, demands a citizenry which can interpret alertly and maturely and language in which its discussions take place. We live in a symbol saturated culture: our ways of using and reacting to symbols, our ways of describing things, our ways of understanding statements, etc. (in a word, our neuro-semantic reactions) enter into every life-situation. Our distinguishing human characteristic is that we are symbol-users: it is probably impossible to overestimate the importance of training a mature and scientific use of this fundamental human tool.



Everyone would agree that the training we ourselves have, and which we are giving to others, is not good enough. I do not think it essential to feel that pessimism (about the future or about "human nature") which to some people is a corollary: but we cannot suppose recognizing a sort of breakdown in our communicative machinery, whether we measure that by the growth of unbalanced and violent attitudes, by the apparent failure of several discussions to achieve agreement, or by some other measure of our own, such as the seemingly increasing proportion of obtuse readers among our students. We have made highly satisfactory progress toward universal literacy: but obviously literacy is not enough. Semantic maladjustment is, if anything, more common among the highly literate. Several contemporary events (the rise of demagogic dictators, the spectacular success of somewhat questionable advertising, etc.) suggest that perhaps literacy alone, without trained evaluation habits, may be a public danger.

Obviously any investigation of the reading skill of any bigger group of college students or of adults is, at first glance, discouraging for people who have faith that social progress is guaranteed by formal education. For the tests divulge what every teacher dealing with the problem already knows: that there is a great gap between what the test passage "says" and what the students read in it. In classes, students are always ready and eager to "debate" and "discuss" another's opinions: but, when they are asked simply to state what (good or bad, correct or incorrect) it was the author *said*, as many as 70% of many classes will be unable to give even a fairly accurate account. Opinions will be "read into" the passage. Then, the student reacts as if "what he read" was equal to "what the author says".

Sometimes the reader will project his own opinions, and see them reflected in what he reads. He credits the author



with saying what "any intelligent man" (i.e., the teacher) "must" say on that subject. Sometimes he will project into the passage what he feels the author "must have meant" in view of what the reader knows about him. Suppose that a corporation executive should write an article advocating increased governmental supervision of industrial production. Many people, knowing that the author was a "business man" and the "business men" are "against" government regulation, are quite capable of summing up this article as "a defence of the free enterprise system against interference by the government". No amount of merely textual commentary will teach students who read in this way to do any better. The teacher, by explaining the text of the essay, may straighten them out on this particular passage, but they will repeat the pattern of their errors the next time they read.

Note what people who misread this "business man" are doing. They are assuming that the connotations which *they* have for a class-name ("business man") necessarily describe every individual to whom the name can be applied. To put it another way, the generalizations which they have made about a class of individuals (no matter how these definitions have been made) describe each individual in the class without the further necessity of observing those separate individuals at all. This is equivalent to reacting to the actual world as if it happened to be the world of stereotypes, political cartoons, etc. It is important to notice that the misreading occurred, not through ignorance, but through a disordered semantic reaction; the error has occurred because the reader's attitude toward symbols is radically immature.

A careful observer will be able to add many examples to like behaviour from discussions he has listened to. A very frequent pattern in discussion consists of an answer by B, not to A's statement, but to what B feels that A "must have

meant". To illustrate this pattern, I transcribe a conversation I had recently with a student:

People with college educations (the student said) know more, and hence are better judges of people. But aren't you assuming (I asked) that a college education gives not only what we usually call 'knowledge,' but also what we usually call 'shrewdness' or 'wisdom'?

Oh, you mean that there isn't use in going to college!!

This pattern, filled in by the context of the conversation, accounts for a very large number of misinterpretations, misquotations, misrepresentations, etc. from which each of us has suffered at some time or other. Its existence suggests that many verbal distortions, which we are accustomed to interpret angrily as being malignantly motivated, may occur because so many people have trained themselves in inadequate and disintegrated semantic reactions. This students' response to my remark depends upon a long previous training of the student, which has resulted in the habitual behaviour of reacting to every situation as if that situation could have only two values. I "must be" *either* praising or disparaging "college education": since my remark did not sound like praise, I therefore "must think" that college is "no good".

It is easy enough in a classroom situation to treat examples of misreading as if the reactions involved were matters of words alone, and hence "serious" only in so far as they prejudice the student's success in a course. But the issues involved are much wider. In such situations the student is reacting to something (a remark, sentence) as if it were something else (what he "thought" it was); furthermore, he is unaware that the latter is, or *can be*, something other than

the former. Now this is serious, for this unawareness, this reacting to an inaccurate picture of the situation (a picture nevertheless "thought to be" accurate) is characteristic of frustration-producing experiences.

These considerations suggest that the problem of "teaching reading" will be solved reasonably well only with a much wider framework that within which it has been traditionally approached. With the school, reading is not a "subject", but rather a basic skill, prerequisite to full participation in school and community life. In a written passage, someone has made some statements to the reader about something. No doubt the primary responsibility for "clarity of expression" lies with the writer; but nevertheless the writer's effort, like the speaker's, is ultimately at the mercy of the reader's set of habitual reactions. Communication between individuals (essential to the co-operative solving of our very symbolic *human* problems) can be quickly abolished by unskilful (i.e., disordered) reading and listening as by confused writing and speaking.

Unfortunately, it has been traditional to try to solve the problem of teaching reading by beginning with the content of the language passages: i.e., reading has been treated as primarily a process of apprehending the "meaning of words". Several teachers seem to think of reading as if it were a passive process, by which the "meaning" of the passage is registered in the student if he "knows" the words. But human beings are not cameras, nor are words the kind of stimuli which unequivocally carry their own "meaning" with them. Whatever techniques we adopt must be based upon the scientific knowledge that the reading process is an active organization by the reader, suggested to him the sentences he reads, but formed into a "meaningful" experience by the pattern of his own reactions. Hence, if we find unsatisfactory



reading, we must make our specific diagnosis in terms of the reader's trained reactions to symbol situations: we cannot solve it by analysis of language *alone*. The problem is in the reader, not in the content of the passage he is reading. And, in the reader, what we must be concerned with is not what several teachers worry about: "lack of vocabulary", ignorance of "ideas", etc. Ignorance and inexperience are relatively curable, given a workable method *in the student*.

What the teacher of reading must be related to is the pattern of the student's reaction to symbol-situations, his attitude towards language, his *evaluating* of what he reads: in other words, the ordering of his neuro-semantic reactions. If a student is to learn to read well, to overcome ancient behaviour in language-situations, he must be trained to react maturely: he must receive habits of proper evaluation. For it is the pattern of his active, habitual experiences which organizes "what the passage says" into what the passage "means" to him. If we are to learn to teach (and not merely advocate) "intelligent reading", we must, I am convinced, deal with students on this fundamental level. And doing this includes reexamining our assumptions about what we are doing, so that we can take advantage of the large quantity of new knowledge about the human use of symbols which has been discovered during the last generation. This knowledge is inevitably knowledge of the mechanisms and process included in human reaction to (symbolically-organized) situations.

Intelligent, mature, skilful reading involves some knowledge of the relations between symbols and what the symbols are symbols "of", of human methods of organizing (perceiving) and symbolizing situations, of the life-effects of semantic habits, of the mechanisms and processes which underlie behaving with symbols, etc.



This knowledge is the content of the science of general semantics, which supplies for the teacher of reading of reading that "wider basis" for a solution which we have just mentioned, and in addition suggests a large number of empirically tested and immediately usable devices.

## II

The problem of common semantics is to make clear the processes by which human beings formulate situations in symbols and react to these linguistic formulations. In other words, it is the science of language-fact relationship and the processes underlying communication. But, as Alfred Korzybski has shown conclusively, the problem is much more than an abstract logical problem. As general semantics is formulated in his pioneer text and in the work of his collaborators, it deals also (and inescapable, since this is part of a single unified problem) with the life-implications of linguistic formulation. All this, you may say, sounds rather complex and formidable; what does it have to do with the immediate classroom problem of teaching students to read at least a little better? Well, first of all, the greatest immediate hindrance in the way of any attempt to improve reading is the reader's unconsciousness of the mechanism and structure of his disordered semantic reactions.

The assumptions which underlie his faulty reading are unconscious (and hence uncontrollable): he is not able to see how the "meaning" he found in the passage, or his reaction to it, can be faulty or inadequate. Thus training in common semantics is a very powerful technique for improving "reading habits" as well as other reactions to symbols. For general semantics provides techniques for making conscious (and therefore *controllable*) the unconscious assumptions which lead to improper evaluation. It has been shown

empirically that understanding the nature of language-situations is itself a very powerful developer of more mature reaction-patterns, and hence of more adequate "command of the language" and response to symbols. The probable explanation of this fact is that so large a proportion of inadequate language-situations stem from a "misunderstanding" of language-fact relationships. (I put the word in quotation marks to indicate that I do not necessarily mean a conscious misunderstanding. It is not a matter of holding a false theory, but rather of proceeding on *the basis* of a silent assumption about language which is not in accord with empirical fact.)

Every observer of language-behaviour can call up examples of such "misunderstandings" of language-fact relationships. One of those most commonly met in teaching reading is the "one word—one meaning" fallacy. Suppose a class is directed to read an easy in which, among other things, the author states that he believes that college education should develop "open and enquiring, *skeptical* habits of enquiry". Many students in that class will read that the author advocates atheism, religious disbelief, etc. If some one objects that the interpretation doesn't seem to fit the context, these students will triumphantly announce: "But that's what he says! That's what *skepticism* means!"

Such a pattern of reaction has been reinforced by many social factors (such as the still prevalent school-marmish worship of "the dictionary"), but most of all by the silent assumption that words are more important than what words point to. It is easy enough to show students by examples, by exercise in a paraphrase, that no word ever has the "same meaning". But even that does not break him of the unscientific (and dangerous) habit of feeling that the way to solve a problem is to arrive at a agreed definition of a word.

Yet, certainly, for adequate reading, the question for the student to consider is not "the meaning" of any word (skepticism, democracy, cat, dog, the Chrysler Building, etc.), but rather what the words as *the author uses them* are symbols of. This point is crucial, because it involves the relationship of symbols and events. Unless the reader understands it, he can only see in what he reads the reflection of his own "meaning" for words. Furthermore, he will constantly be led astray in his reaction to what he reads. If the author uses a given word (skepticism) to indicate A (inquisitiveness) whereas I would have used it to indicate B (religious disbelief), I, as a reader, will only be thrown off from considering what he said (deep or shallow, good or bad) by study based on trying to find out what "skepticism" "really means".

Empirical evidence shows that we can train more adequate habits in a reader if we give him a structural explanation of the language-fact relationships involved. One such structural fact about language, for example, which is basic to a scientific general semantics, is that there is no necessary connection between the "things" of the world and the words we use to describe them. You don't eat the printed restaurant menu. Any linguistic formulation is only a kind of map of something which, whatever it is, is *not* the words used to describe it.

### III

The first immediate importance of general semantics in the teaching of reading is to furnish the student with some *structural* notions of the relations of language and "facts". If he is confusing definitions and events, formulations and realities, the explanation of his confusion helps him to overcome it. His infantile feeling (that certain words *have* to go with certain situations) becomes something he can deal

with and change only after a structural explanation enables him to see what his present habits assume. For until it is made conscious, it is just part of situation to him, something forming the situation of whose existence he is unaware.

Nobody "really believes" that symbols dominate and control "nature" (the assumption of primitive magic) or that some words equal reality (identification of formulation and thing formulated); but many people continue to *behave* in a manner which assumes these beliefs, without realizing that they are so behaving.

In general semantics, symbols are considered as being on different levels. Korzybski's basic teaching analogy is the comparison of a statement to a map, which may be "good" or "bad", depending on how it reflects the structure of the territory. But, good or bad, the map is not the territory, nor does it tell *all* about the territory. Furthermore, we can have maps of maps (statements about statements) indefinitely.

My own experience has been that this explanation reduces considerably and immediately the amount of "misreading" among college students. The various "misreadings" which come from feeling that a word must always "mean" the same tend to disappear when students start to feel that statements are on different levels. Several of them begin to develop the ability to see "through" the words to what the author is talking about. It is, of course, on the interpretation of very highly abstract words (more accurately, high-order abstractions) that most students have difficulty in reading. Such words are generally symbols for semantic disturbance, or effort to create semantic disturbance: this fact has led some people to "distrust" all high-order abstractions. In students we find, just as often as we find a belief in "real meaning", a feeling that no word on a higher level than "dog" or "cat" can be used "meaningfully". Instruction in



general semantics performs a very useful function for these readers. Very few of them have ever considered the difficulties comprises in the symbolic formulation of situation; most of them in addition have been prevented from understanding language-fact relationships by their own unconscious assumptions about those relationships. My students, whom I mentioned earlier, who concluded that I "must be" either "praising" or "blaming" college education, had this rigid reaction due to of just such an assumption. Even a little discussion about non-identity, levels of statement, functions of languages etc., makes the evaluations of many of them more flexible. This last result brings us back to what I feel to be the prime significance of general semantics for the teaching of reading: that is keeps our consideration (and our students') riveted on the question of the structure of the reader's reaction.

It cannot be repeated too often that misreading, being in the reader, cannot be cured in the text. I have found that it is helpful to teach some facts about the structure of human reactions to symbols as well as those about language-fact relationships we have just discussed. It is essential to repeat this, and to insist on it so strongly, since, in most of us who handle the reading problem professionally, the language-centered tradition of our training is so strong that it seems more "natural" to approach the problem from the direction of language. But in fact, in social action, in education, etc., what counts is not what the text "means" in the abstract, what the author or speaker "meant to say". If I listen to a lecturer, What I go away quoting him as saying, what I actually "heard" him say (even though it is far from what he "meant") is what he has communicated to me.

Thus, unskilled listening, misunderstanding, etc., on my part prevents exact communication. It leads to radical mis-

evaluation by me of the speaker and of the speaker's words; at leads me to action based upon a false formulation of the situation. The whole incident may be a trivial one, but in principle it is serious. (What difference would there have been in contemporary history had a large proportion of Germans reacted to Hitler's talk of the "Greater German Reich" as if the symbols represent a semantic disturbance in Hitler rather than as if it represented a "reality"?) I have my "meaning", "opinion", my ways of reacting to symbols. But I may be completely ignorant of how I achieved these "opinions", very unconscious of the *structure* of my reactions to symbols presented to me. Unless these considerations are called to my attention, I will be simply not able to see how my reaction to the speaker, what I "heard", what I feel and do, *can* be "wrong". I "heard what he said", and "any normal human being" would of course react just as I did.

What must the student know to transcend this communication-defeating attitude? General semantics (and the results of those who have taught it to students) suggests several techniques. The student must learn *not* to respond to symbols as if they were signals for immediate invariable total reactions; that is, he must transcend "signal reactions" such as those displayed by Pavlov's animals or by choleric humans whose blood-pressure rises when the name of the opposition political party is explained. He must learn to check or delay his response until he relates the symbols to some real situation other than his own inner trained likes and dislikes. To do this, he needs two different sorts of knowledge and training. First of all he needs to know something of "neuro-semantic" side of general semantics: he must see the difference between signal (automatic) and symbol reactions. Without structural explanation, advice to the student to delay his response to his reading, not to "burst out with hasty

opinions", not to assume that his first reading is "what it says", etc., remains only good advice: excellent, something to which he will "agree", but which he will have no technique at all for carrying out. As formulated in general semantics, attainment of mature symbol reactions is not an "ideal" to be praised, but becomes a problem for the student to solve.

Second, the student needs to realize the indivisibility, the unitary "body-mind" character of his reaction to symbols, which is often concealed from him by conventional instruction in language in the abstract. A little study shows how, in fact, we learn our language, how, with our vocabulary, we absorb attitudes and valuations suggested by the weightings ("emotional connotations") which the words have in the social groups we belong to. Such study brings home to the student very rapidly the total-organic nature of language-reactions. It also has the effect of making him more sensitive to the shadings and weightings which the author put on the words. He can begin to look on what he reads as a map of *something* and judge it on that basis as good, bad, significant, misleading, deep, shallow, etc., rather than giving his immediate reaction to it on the basis of how closely it corresponds to the pattern of signal reactions which he happens to bring to it.

#### IV

In this brief treatment it is impossible to indicate more than a few of the general areas in which general semantics is useful for teacher and student of reading. Nor is it possible to give anything but a misleading account of general semantics itself. I am very conscious that a short article like this one does not help anyone at once to apply general semantics to reading instruction in the specific circumstances in which he works. I hope though that enough has been said to indicate that



the *methodological* synthesis of knowledge (scientific, linguistic, epistemological, etc.) achieved in general semantics furnishes the basis for a broader and more adequate solution of the active problem of teaching reading.

For all evidence points to the conclusion that, if we are to achieve what we hope for in reading instruction, we must include evaluation factors as well as training in word-recognition. The communication process involves both speakers and listeners, writers and readers, using a socially-constructed symbol-system, in whose structure "reality" must be represented. This communication-process can never be even reasonably effective until the attitude of *both* parties towards their mutual language is reasonably mature; but the process can be destroyed more easily by listeners than by speakers. A wise man can learn from a fool, but a fool cannot learn from a wise man unless he ceases to be a fool.

We must guard against the notion that the problem of teaching reading in schools is confined to a number of verbally-awkward students, those who usually end up in "remedial reading" clinics. Inadequate vocabulary, semi-literacy, a poor command of the technical terms of a field, etc., are not the only indications of a need for "remedial instruction" in reading. Signal-reactions, inability to relate language to territory, and other neuro-semantic disorders are often combined with brilliant verbal facility. Some students do not so much read a passage as make it the stimulus for producing a verbal pattern touched off by their own personal reaction to the original words.

The final point which I want to make here in regard to general semantics in reading instruction is that general semantics bring scientific justification for a belief which English teachers have always held: the vital social and personal importance of language-instruction. (The corollary



drawn by some English teachers, that the kind of instruction which most of us now give is adequate, does not however follow.) The pattern of an individual's neuro-semantic reactions underlies his personal adjustment and his social action: infantile reactions to symbol (including inadequate reading) are symptoms of a wider immaturity of personality. Hence language-instruction should always be undertaken in the wider context of the total reaction of the *student*, which is exactly what many great English teachers have long advocated. General semantics gives us the validated techniques for tackling our job on this fundamental basis.

Perhaps the best way to finish an article like this one on the importance of general semantics is to suggest a short list of readings for the study of general semantics. This list is not a full "bibliography" but is only meant to notice a few available books. Teachers wishing to apply general semantics seriously should consult the fuller bibliographies in these books. They should also inquire concerning pamphlets and reprints which are available at these two sources:

Institute of General Semantics, 1234 East 56th Street, Chicago 37.

ETC.: A Review of General Semantics, Editorial Offices, 3300 Federal Street, Chicago 16.

## High-School Graduates and their Library

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They will become graduate within three months. It was difficult to keep their minds on the regular English programme. Several of the boys had deferments that would last only through commencement day. Nearly all the others would be eighteen soon after. many of the girls were engaged. Marriage was in the air, the essential combination of war and romance. Here were the adults of a too-close tomorrow. Only the future was real. We talked of the homes that young people would established after the war. In a technical school the pupils are especially aware of the vast changes on the way in materials and designs for new houses, so they discussed plastics and glass refrigeration. But (the teacher was thinking) what could XII b English contribute to that home of tomorrow? Improvements in designs, materials, comforts, and conveniences are find, but do they make for better ideals and standards that turn the house into a home? The question was place before the class. What can English XII B contribute to the home that you will build as young adults? Undeniable, they responded, there would be better speech as a result of their English work, and, yes, there should be better books. Should be? There *would* be.

From the vague "better books" we turned to *what* books and so set upon our last work of the year. We would condition

the books that would consist of the basic library of a young couple—high school graduates both—who were just establishing their new home. Our principal, who became an enthusiastic ally, suggested that we call our library “A Five-Foot Shelf for the High-School Graduate”.

As to cost, we did not set out with a definite sum earmarked “library fund”. We decided to make a complete list of all the books we felt necessary. Then we would assume that the young couple would purchase them at once, or gradually, as a part of their household budget, depending on their finances and other factors.

These books were not to be considered a complete lifetime library. They were to be just the first books that every high-school graduate's home should have. By way of getting library-minded, we discussed first the joy and value of possessing books. Free texts and public libraries represent the greatest boon to the dissemination of knowledge since the magic of Gutenberg, but they do not compensate for private ownership. So, from a perception of the desirability of maintaining a personal library, we went on to show the difference between a planned library and one chosen at random. We read many chapters in Drury and Simmettee's *What Books Shall I Read?* and felt that we were now ready to plan the basic library for the high-school graduate. Soon several enthusiastic pupils began to nominate favourite books as “musts” on the list. They were quieted by pupils who saw that such procedure violated the policy of orderly and deliberate selection. Fiction was ruled out, as it was thought that taste in fiction varied too much, but some felt that later we might compile a list according to authors and sorts of stories. It was interesting, however, to note that all the novels so impulsively suggested were those which had been made into movies within the last two or three years: *Now Voyager*,

*Wuthering Heights*, *This Above All* and *Lost Horizon*. The movie of the day could not be wrong. The date of the original publication was of no concern.

Apparently recency was the chief factor in all their selections, for in all subsequent discussion they would not hear of anything before World War I. A few classics, maybe. The wisdom of the ages was nothing compared to the latest Hollywood release! Since the mere naming of books was not in keeping with our idea of careful planning, it was essential to use another method. So we decided to work from categories after first determining what these categories should comprise.

As the Bible had already mentioned by two pupils, the teacher considered it a good starting-point and suggested that the term "religious" be used to designate the first category. The class thought that the word "Bible" would be sufficient, as the average family would not want any other religious books. There was general agreement to this idea. It was obvious that they were thinking of theological works, so *The Man Nobody Knows* by Bruce Barton was brought in as an example of the kind of book they might wish to have in their collection. Perhaps philosophy might have been a satisfactory alternative, but "religious" has a special connotation which it would be well for adolescents and adults to bear in mind.

The class accepted the teacher's recommendation without my further discussion and went on to determine the next category. There was no definite or formal outline. The list was to grow out of their own experiences and of four years of English training. The teacher receded further into the background. Each day a pupil acted as chairman and one of the Four Freedoms—the freedom of speech—was in full sway.



"We need a first-aid book". (Red Cross classes!) Every one admitted that the first-aid book was necessary. "Yes, but that isn't enough. We need a general book on health". "We should have medical book for everybody". "My mother has a great 'big one—tells you how to doctor everything from measles to pneumonia". "We don't want that old-fashioned kind". They agreed to include some modern medical books appropriate to the layman.

Some girls wanted a book on interior decorating. Others believed that you could get enough help from magazines. The boys sided with these; so there would be no basic book on interior decoration. After so argument the boys won a place for a home-repair book. "You couldn't get that out of magazines. You would have to know what to do in a jiffy, and you would need something with an index".

Both boys and girls wanted something on family relations "People should study more about how to get along together. There wouldn't be so many divorces". "You wouldn't need a book if girls would stay home instead of running out every night as they do nowadays". There was a good chairman that day. Rapping for order he reminded them that they were getting off the point. "Do you want a book on family relations, or not? From the way you are acting, you will need something". That settled it. A book on family relations would go on the list.

Everyone agree that a good cookbook was most essential. The boys made jokes about the girl of today not learning how to cook at home. She had to have a book. Classes in nutrition which had recently been opened to both boys and girls made everyone conscious of the need of a book on nutritions as well as a general all-around cookbook. The principal, who kept in touch with us, was most enthusiastic about the nutrition and health categories and was especially

pleased with the interest of the boys. He was present the day of the individual reports on these classifications. One of the leading boys in the class had made a thorough study of the whole subject and his recommendations were readily adopted.

The next day the girls had thought of a good one: "We must have a book on etiquette". "Oh, yeah", groaned the boys. "Mrs. Post!" This was sarcasm, but one brave young lady, not realizing that Mrs. Post was the authority on etiquette, ventured that she had been reading about another book that was just as good. Someone else was on the defensive; "There is no book on etiquette that compares with Mrs. Post's. Mrs. Post's is the very best". "Yest, the best for rich people. We would never need know about those teas and receptions she tells you about", were quick rejoinders. A check revealed that no one really knew Mrs. Post's book. A few had looked into it. One girl had read something about introductions; another had used it to learn how to be a proper weekend guest. But most of them admitted that they knew great book only by reputation.

This interlude allowed the teacher a comment. A plan was established for completing the categories and reporting on them separately so that a tentative book could be selected in each field. The reports—to be made by individual pupils or committee—would include all available information: author, title, publisher, date of publication or revision, price, number of pages, and general description of the contents. Although autologous and publishers' lists were to be consulted, the pupils were advised to see the books for themselves and to bring copies to school if possible. The book selected by the class on the basis of the reports would serve as the representative book within a given category. Later, when the special reports were made on books of etiquette, Mrs. Post's won.

The discussions on what would constitute the categories were resumed with the same youthful fervor. The next conflict was over the dictionary. Some wanted an unabridged. They were overruled by those who felt that good standard desk or a collegiate edition would meet the needs of our young couple. This squabbling compared with the life-and-death struggle over the issue of a set of encyclopedias versus a general single reference. "What is home without a set of encyclopedias?" "We have always had some kind of source books in our house". "We want something practical, not something that just looks pretty". "We want to read up on the countries where our boys are fighting". "That remind me", said the chairman, "we shall need an atlas". There was a truce as both sides agreed to add an atlas to the list. The reference problem was still with them when the bell rang. Overnight I talked with the librarian. She and I were agreed that the single reference book as a good basic book. The deadlock was not broken up the next day. Each side was loaded with reinforcements: "My mother says...." "My uncle is a lawyer and he knows...." "Aw, these people are not going to be lawyers". "A general reference book gives sufficient facts for the average person". The chairman suggested that they wait for the report on the single reference book before deciding. One bright girl had also talked with the librarian and was ready to report on the general reference book found in the school library. She did not give her complete report at that time, but its price of fifteen dollars as against a minimum of fifty dollars to one hundred and fifty dollars for an encyclopedia silenced the "whole-set" people. However, they could not resist adding that they knew that the couple would eventually want a *Britannica*. Pupils taking a recently inaugurated class in Latin-American history were calling for a book on Latin American.



Those who had taken Spanish were sympathetic. Other held that the world was growing smaller and that we could argue for a book on every country and every language. The "good-neighbourites" were indignant: "It wasn't the same thing". "The South Americans were next door to us". "We should know more about them". Some who were taking sociology declared that there were kinds of Americans right here in the United States of America that we could learn more about. A special book about South America was not included. Later at the time of the special reports upon the advice of the librarian, a boy brought in a copy of the *Stateman's Year Book*. He maintained that this book would be an excellent supplement to the atlas we had included. The same pupil also had brought a current issue of the *World Almanac* as a essential volume on Americana. The discussion on Latin-American history divulged that there was no United States history on the list. This dreadful oversight was remedied by common consent. They would find the best history ever written. The next suggestion to have a book on gardening received no support.

Victory gardens would be out after the war. The average person could get enough advice from newspapers and magazines, to say nothing of last year's experience. A book on science, however, was though advisable. The general high-school text was voted down in favour of a more readable type of work like something from the pen of De Druif or Slosson. At this point a check on the categories disclosed that there was nothing on art, music, or literature. Literature was discussed first. They decided against any sort of literary history, as brightest girl in the class, who had by this time made a thorough investigation of the general-reference book in the library, reported that it contained a fine section on literature.



The question of literature was not dropped wholly. Someone suggested that there be some Shakespeare in the house. "But will it be read?" "Having it would simulate the reading of it". "Anyway no cultured home should be without copies of Shakespeare". The plays would be put into the movies after the war. People would want to read them then. The movie argument swayed the doubters, and the great master made his entrance to our shelves. After Shakespeare had made a place for himself, it was not tough to gain acceptance of an anthology of British and American poetry. A collection of short stories was rejected as friction. Later, however, on discovering that there were nineteen categories, they agreed to add a short-story collection to bring the total list to the round number of twenty. The final fight was over a book on music and art, respectively. The conflict revolved around the question as to whether music and art were special interests on a part of our general culture. The "general culturists" were a high-pressure group. They waxed eloquent on the accountohility of the high-school graduate to contribute to the cultural tone of his community. "Opera was heard over the radio". "Television would be making it more realistic". The arguments for a book on art were not so vehement or as convincing, but the two had been present jointly and were voted in on the general-culture ticket.

The list of categories was now considered complete. The job now was to get the reports on the various books within each classification so that a tentative outline might be selected and the whole basic library as we conceived it be presented in review. The principal asked the librarian to arrange for a general exhibit in the school library of as many of the books as she and the class could secure.

A mere perusal of the final list appended could never tell the story of the fun of picking and choosing—the lively

squabbles and the really serious efforts of the more earnest pupils to get the most reliable and accurate books in each field. The class took pride in discussing the experiment with their friends on the outside and became quite "book conscious" as to whether the books they met during that time might or might not merit a place on our shelves. Upon the invitation of the librarian, class was held in the library so that books in the category discussed could be examined and placed on a special table for further reference before the final choice was made. After the list was completed, the class did not meet again, as commencement week was at hand. We had not done all that we wanted to do—what magazines for this new home, what children's books, what ways of adding to the library once it was begun? Yet we did accomplish our biggest aim of making library-building a part of the graduate's thinking in planning his own home. Our list would be valuable starting-point.

## Treatment of Disorders of Personality

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What stimulated me to think over the problem was an accidental occurrence. I spent the spring of 1939 in England and said Mass at times on Sunday for a Catholic family that lived in a large country mansion and had in their house their own private chapel. In one visit to this beautiful country home I noticed a few books lying on a table covered with manila paper and labelled in large letters: SERVANTS LIBRARY. I became interested in seeing what sort of books were chosen for the servants' library and glanced through them. They constituted a little sequel of novels in which the main theme was the calamities of Betty who stole butter and various such articles from the store house. Though the crudity of this attempt at bibliotherapy could not help but strike me as amusing nevertheless, for some reason the problem of treating behaviour disorders by reading kept recurring to my mind. Surely there must be some better material than the calamities of Betty.

I approached various libraries and gathered the impression that at least some of those who work with selecting books for children had mainly before their mind the objective of getting children interested in reading. To attain this end they felt that one must carefully avoid any attempt to preach to children through books. Furthermore, I found that great



deal of children's literature is nothing but innocent nonsense and seems to be void of any religious or moral value. But should this be? It seems to me that there are opportunities for those who write children's literature to instruct as well as amuse and that a number of writers have availed themselves of this opportunities without having fallen into the crudities of the calamities of Betty.

One who gives a great deal of time to one field of investigation is likely to be profoundly ignorant of other fields. He knows what is going on in other fields by hearsay and glancing over an article that happens to come his way. I wish to confess to this profound ignorance of Education and English literature but from my hearsay information it seems that a profound change has come over education. It has become very practical and utilitarian. One has to be prepared for a job. A secretary should know how to spell, but ordinarily she does not have to produce a masterpiece of English literature which her boss reads as an essay of his own. Have the days passed when the student was called upon, not only to translate the Latin and Greek classics, but also to produce a translation which, while being true to the original by a deft choice of words, was also a magnificent piece of English in itself?

And then, were there not days when moral ideals were in some way made to glow with the brightness of classic antiquity and seemed all the more wonderful and desirable because of the literary beauty with which they were clothed? It is true that the study of languages has for its main object the attempt to enable the student to travel and do business in a foreign land and no longer converges in the development of the power to give expression to thoughts in masterful English? Is it true that moral education is no longer an objective at all, let alone a superior aim that transcends even



the imparting of knowledge and the development of the power of expression? There was a day when normal education was an objective even in the copy books which the children used in learning how to write and spell.

Are we face to face with a current philosophy which is sensationalistic in its psychology and utilitarian in its moral outlook on life? Sensationalism does not admit the existence of general principles so it is idle to raise the question of their moral value or to attempt to inculcate them. It is true that any such attempt is becoming more and more rare in the school and in the home? "Consider", says one writer, "the disappearance of mottoes from the kitchen wall and that incredible loss to the structural framework of social character, the vanished Spencerian copy book which was for our day a modern version of Aesop's Fables, whose wise saws have done so much to epitomize laudable conduct from the past, for the present and the future. 'God bless our home' has vanished along with 'Honesty is the best policy', 'Practice makes the master'; 'A penny saved is a penny earned'; 'A stitch in time saves nine'."

It is not for us to consider now whether these things have really passed away or whether they were effective means of character training or whether better means are now available. But I would like to point out that the human mind does harbour ideals and principles and that it is a matter of prime importance to develop in the mind of the child worthwhile ideals and true principles. In a study made by Betke in our Department it was found that non-delinquent boys solve moral problems by sound ethical principles much more frequently than do delinquent boys and the difference is statistically significant. Occasionally a delinquent boy chooses for himself a false ideal. Some time ago a number of boys in an institution for delinquents were asked among other things

to name their greatest hero. One boy named Dillinger as his ideal or adolescent is likely to manifest some abnormality of conduct. There is a great deal of empirical evidence to show that false ideals and principles have something to do with abnormalities of behaviour.

## II

Thinking over possibilities of treatment for those who manifest personality disorders led me to recall the calamities of Betty and to seek a better type of bibliotherapy. Finally I asked Miss Clara Kircher of the Public Library in Newark to work out for me a bibliography which might help me in my attempts to treat the problem child.

Such a bibliography had certain fundamental demands:

1. The books must be interesting in themselves and provide easy reading on the level of the reader;
2. Each book must be assigned to its grade level and so labelled;
3. There must be a subject index giving in alphabetical order the main problems for which children come to a child guidance clinic.

The idea back of the method is that when one knows the problem with which the child is confronted, he picks a book in which the child can read of someone who met the same difficulty which the child is suffering and handled it in a satisfactory way. It is hoped that the child will himself see from reading the book the true way of dealing with his problem and set out on that way without any more ado. In my experience with the technique, I find that when a child is in the acute stage of any sort of problem he is likely to read his problem into almost any book somewhere, even though one familiar with the book did not see at first sight that it had anything particularly to do with the child's

problem. It is however a great help to have a bibliography such as Miss Kircher prepared for me and the books at hand to offer the child. Most children are very glad to take a book home. From my experience also it seems that most children read for interest only and do not crystallize out of their reading any principles of conduct. It does not follow, however, that random reading of good books is of little or not ethical value.

Thus one learns something by random experience, though he would have learned a great deal more had he been directed by one who knew how to point out things of value. It appears to be a matter of special value to ask the child to tell you what the story was about and then by questioning to lead the child to formulate the appropriate mental principle to gain admittance to the mind and be accepted as logically true but it demands something more for the principle to be come an actual and practical guide of conduct.

Thus, in one of my early efforts at bibliography I loaned a boy Hubert Skidmore's *Hill Doctor*. The eleven and a half year old youngster was having such violent scenes with the lady with whom his mother shared a house that it seemed that his mother would have to move elsewhere.

Besides, he was very selfish towards his smaller brother, never allowing the little fellow to handle or play with his toys; finally he was not studying at school and got down in the dumps when he was scolded. He came for a number of visits and we had a chat about what he had learned from the *Hill Doctor*. In the first interview after he had been given to book he said that he had learned that the *Hill Doctor* worked among poor country people but no matter how poor they were they shared whatever they had with anyone who required it. This is mentioned in the most incidental way in Skidmore's novel; and our boy's calling attention to it as a

major item is probably an example of how one reads into a book rather than out of it his own personal problems. I might have asked at once "would it not be reasonable, therefore, for you to share your things with your little brother". But I did not. Somewhat later he complained about the lady with whom the family lived, scolding him. And I asked him for what. He replied, "For teasing my little brother and taking his toys without asking him and not allowing him to play with mine". Here, I thought, was my opportunity to recall to his mind what he had learned from the hill folk who shared whatever they had with anybody else. And so I asked if the example of the hill folk did not suggest that he should share his things with his little brother. He answered right away, "Not a bit of it!" "Why?" I queried. He replied, "If I ever let him have anything I will never get it back". I let the matter drop, making no attempt to argue the point.

The incident is very instructive. It shows that principles may enter the mind and be accepted as true and even admirable; but they are not allowed, for all that, to be a factor in determining conduct. We must not, however, become discouraged but go on with our attempt to develop sound principles in the mind of the child and if we can do nothing to make them become determiners of conduct, to expect that in some way that principles once planted will in due season be activated. This is precisely what happened in our problem boy. Somewhat later, in talking over the *Hill Doctor*, he told me how a boy wanted to take care of the hill doctor's horse because he liked the horse so much. The doctor thought he was too small and at first said no. The little fellow begged and so the doctor finally consented just to make him happy.

I asked, "Have you applied that principle to yourself?"

He answered, "Yes".

I asked, "How?"



"If my little brother wants to do something and I don't want him to, I should let him do it just to make the little fellow happy". And then, without waiting for further questions, he blurted out, "I have done this several times already".

"How?"

"He likes to sit on my bike and work the pedals. It makes him think he's driving. I used to make him get off but now I let him work the pedals just because it makes him happy. I also let him play with lots of other things."

And so we see that further reading has activated an important moral truth which has passed from a logical principal to a moral maxim influencing conduct. It might be well to note that the incident about the doctor, the horse, and the little boy, while occurring in Skidmore's novel has been embellished to such an extent that Skidmore would not recognize it. It is another example of how the child reads his problem into the back and if it is not there in proper form from the imagination of the child weaves in details of his own creation and unconsciously produces an incident that satisfies his personal needs.

One might remark, too, that what a child picks out of a book is often what is incidental and trivial as far as the plot and the main thought of the novel is concerned. Freud has pointed out that the dreamer selects just such trivialities in the experience of the previous day as the starting point of the dream. There is something in the incident that has a direct analogy with the major problems in the life of the dreamer and it is this analogous something which initiates the dream. In a very similar way the child's attention is caught by incidents which touch his personal problems. He seems to ponder them unconsciously and in so doing he adds to them in imagination and the resulting complex is very like a

dream but a dream that is remembered as an incident that was read about in a book. Psychiatrists term such falsifications "pseudo-hallucinations of memory".

In an early interview the boy told me that when the Hill Doctor was in medical school he had someone to stand over him when he was doing an operation and make sure he did it right. When corrected he did not get angry. All this is read into the story by the boy. I said nothing; but, in a later interview when we were talking over his sensitiveness to correction, I reminded him of what he told me about the Hill Doctor and suggested that the next time he was scolded it might be well to say, "Thank you. I will try to do better". My advice seemed utterly thrown away, for a several subsequent interviews I learned to violent emotional scenes when he had been corrected. But after a dormant period of varying lengths seeds finally do sprout. So some weeks later he suddenly turned from telling me about his improvement in school work to blurt out, "Say, you know that trick you taught me last time?" I was not conscious of having taught him anything which in my language I would call a "trick", and so I asked, "What trick?"

"You told me", he said, "that when anybody scolded me I should say, 'Thank you. I'll try to do better'. My aunt scolded me and I tried it out on her. It worked like hot magic. She was so proud. She went out and bought Joe and me Coca-Cola and peanuts and let me stay up till half-past ten."

It is sometimes possible to get a child to read the right book at the right time and bring about a happy solution to an emotional crisis which threatened to end in a dangerous piece of foolish conduct. A sixteen year old girl had been coming to the Child Centre at the Catholic University for epileptic seizures. She came in for one interview rather tense emotionally and announced her intention of leaving home.

"I am sixteen", she said, "and I am going out to get a job and have my own little room all to myself".

There had been a fuss between her father and her grandmother, in the course of which her father told his mother to get out of the house. Our patient defended her grandmother and told her father that he had lived all these years with his mother and had no right now to tell her to get out of the house. So the father then became angry with his daughter and told her that she could get out along with her grandmother. And now she said, "I am determined to do so".

I first tried talking things over endeavouring by ordinary methods to bring about a better understanding but I could not budge her resolution to leave home and go to work.

I then thought of bibliography and suggested a compromise.

"Go to school, just for two weeks. Read a book; write me what you think of it and see me at end of two weeks."

I let her take home *Land Spell* by Gladys Hasty Carroll. Some days later I received the following letter:

"I read the book and now I see what you mean. I must have my education in order to go out and face the world. I perceive now that I must take a step down for happiness. I know now that the man who said 'Pride goeth before the fall' was really right. I have gone to school now for a week and I can truthfully say that I have never had a better time. Dr. Moore, I think my daddy really loves me now and doesn't want me to leave.

I hope you are well and happy and please say hello to your nice secretary for me. Lots of love."

I then loaned her *A Bend in the Road* by Margaret Raymond. It is the story of a girl who left home after being whipped by her father and got a job in a factory. It pictures



explicitly the difficulties she had in living on such a small salary and introduces from time to time the much better lot of those who have been blessed by the opportunities of education. This is never pointed out explicitly but the reader can scarcely fail to see that an uneducated girl attempting to leave home and "go it alone" through life must hope hard and dreary years in a desert land from which there is little hope of any escape.

I asked her when she came back what she got out of the book and so she outlined for me the plot. I then asked, "But what did you get out of it *for yourself*?"

She answered by enumerating a few practical conclusions.

"It shows me that losing my temper is pretty silly.

I don't think I should leave home.

I learned that my father loves me even though he is gruff on the outside."

We followed along with various books all of which she read with interest; but I never heard anything more about leaving home and going to work and "leading my life my way" as she once expressed it.

### III

Who is to make use of bibliotherapy? Is it a technique that only the psychiatrist can handle with safety?

To me it appears that it is a technique that can be used with good effects by parents as well as teachers, provided they are equipped with a full amount of common sense and have a kindly personal interest in the welfare of the child. Strange to say, one cannot take for granted a kindly personal interest in the welfare of the child even in the case of parents. Though it seems to me that any teacher or librarian with common sense and a warm personal interest in the welfare



of children can make good use of bibliotherapy, I have been confronted with the objection that no school could make use of this technique without the services of a psychiatrist. I cannot share this opinion.

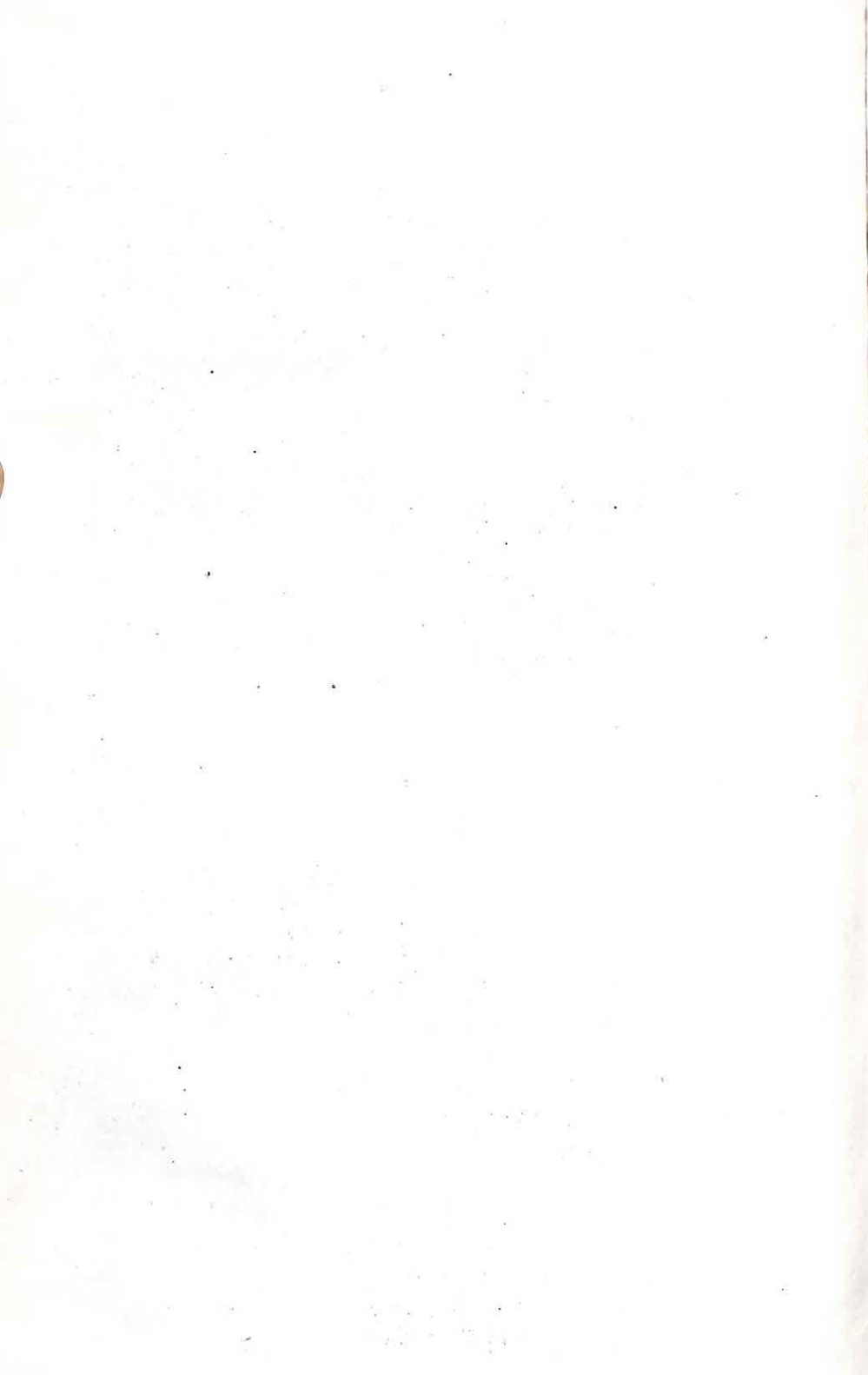
There is, I believed, a good deal of discussion going on at the present time about ways and means of introducing character-training into the school. To me there appear to be many important possibilities opened up by bibliotherapy, specially to the teachers of English literature. With a subject index of novels that touch on the major problems of adolescence and the books available in the school library, any teacher or librarian who can spare a few minutes a week to chat with a boy or girls can help the problem student over many more or less serious emotional problems.

And may I now enter a plea for the creation of a better type of juvenile literature, characterized by the vivid, glowing portrayal plain ordinary human beings struggling with the difficulties of life, failing perhaps, again and again but ultimately working out a worth-while solution to typical problems of human experience?

The true value of such literary productions is going to rely to a very large extent on the author's philosophy of life. And if that is so, there must be much more in the teaching of English than providing the techniques of verbal expression of thought. In the courses in English one must learn how to think the highest thought and conceive the noblest of ideals and give expression to concepts in a masterful language that makes the writer; and to ideals, by virtues that make the man.











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